



# **Changing Practices in a Developing Country: The Issues of Teaching English in Libyan Higher Education**

**PhD Thesis**

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## **Declaration**

I, Mohamed Abushafa, declare that the main text of this thesis entitled Changing Practices in a Developing Country: The Issues of Teaching English in Libyan Higher Education is entirely my own work. This work has not been previously submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

## **Abstract**

Libya is a country which is trying to find its place in the international community. It has a mainly youthful population of about 5.6 million with a median age of 24.8 years and large numbers of young people are accessing university courses. This creates a demand for university places which is increasingly difficult to meet. The recent political changes in Libya have compounded these difficulties. This study investigates the challenges of teaching English in Libyan Higher Education as the country prepares its young people for living and working in a global environment where the English language is predominant. The investigation finds that there is recognition of the importance of English, but the level of language skills of students entering university is well below an acceptable standard, and both teachers and students advocate an early start for learning English in schools. Within the universities the curriculum is not consistent and leads to graduates in English having a limited command of the language. Some evidence suggests that students are not motivated to study English and often choose the programme simply as a means of guaranteeing them a job in the future, or because it is at the most convenient location for them. There is a lack of resources and facilities, with large classes and few rooms for teaching, limited internet and communication technology, and little access to libraries. Teachers are not prepared well for their teaching roles nor supported with development activities, and there are few opportunities for teachers or students to practise their English. The thesis makes a number of recommendations including running summer schools in English speaking countries, online courses with native English speakers, and exchange programmes where teachers can benefit from updating their methodology as well as their language skills. Further recommendations are for the Ministry of Education to have overall control of the curriculum, and for the Libyan government to continue its building programme and prioritise access to technology. One year exchange programmes with English speaking countries would enable native English speakers to be available in all university English departments. It is also recommended that students are motivated by providing courses relevant to them, and that more workshops and activities such as competitions and monthly magazines written by students and teachers are used to encourage involvement.

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# **Chapter 1 Introduction to Study**

## **1.1 Introduction**

In a world which is becoming smaller due to increases in the mobility of people and advances in technology, the significance of English language skills has increased to an extent that English has now become an international language (Stead, nd; Pennycook, 1994; McKay, 2002; Tarone, 2005; Sharifian, 2009; Kilickaya, 2009; Dastgoshadeh and Jalilzadeh, 2011) and is continuing to develop rapidly across areas such as China (Kirkpatrick and Sussex, 2012). Transport, computers, the internet, and mobile phones have all served to make communication links quicker and cheaper, and more accessible. Research from developing countries such as Iran indicates that they are aware of the growth of English language (Dastgoshadeh et al, 2011) and, as a study from Sri Lanka shows (Canagarajah, 1999), people appropriate English for their own purposes and this helps create opportunities. Many are now recognising that English language skills can attract foreign investment and lead to economic benefits (Euromonitor, 2010; Power and Shrestha, 2010).

The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate learning and teaching of English in Libyan universities. In order to provide an introduction to the study, this chapter provides a statement of the research problem, the research objectives and questions, followed by the scope of the study. The chapter then discusses the value of this study and its contribution to knowledge. Both the research context and design are then described and a chapter outline is provided, which gives the structure of this thesis.

## **1.2 Statement of the Research Problem**

The teaching and learning of English language skills are increasingly more significant in Libyan universities, especially as many Libyans are taking advantage of scholarships to further their academic studies in universities abroad (ICEF Monitor, 2012). The oil industry, upon which modern Libya is founded, is a major employer (AfDB, 2012) and a working knowledge of English increases the opportunities for employment in this sector (IMF, 2012). International business has also been investing in Libya and this has served to open up the

country to the influences of involvement in a global community (Davie, 2012). As changes are continuing to impact Libya, English language skills offer the opportunity for the country to find its place in a global environment as it looks beyond its own borders and seeks to build international relationships and partnerships.

Within Libyan universities there have been inconsistencies in the level of English achieved by graduates and this has resulted in many of those accepting scholarships to study abroad having to complete English language courses in the foreign country before embarking on a degree programme; the numbers attending language schools in foreign countries was highlighted in 2011 when Libyan students on government scholarships around the world found their fees were frozen (Maslen, 2011). Kreiba (2012) argues that English language skills in Libya have been so neglected that many Libyans are missing the opportunity to communicate effectively in English. This includes the skills of those studying English as their main subject at university in Libya; a recent English proficiency index placed Libyans as the least proficient in English (Dhaimish, 2012).

In the experience of the researcher as Head of English Department in a Libyan university, it was noticed that English language graduates were completing their studies without being able to use the language; this was despite having studied for some years at university level. This low level of proficiency has been noted also in Libyan school leavers (Al Moghani, 2003) and indicates that the problem may lie with the teaching methodology across the educational system. However, Gadour (2006: 173) argues that there are systems in place for school teachers who are expected to follow fixed methodologies set out in books, although he concedes that university teachers do not receive even such limited support, and are left to their own devices with reference to teaching approaches. Additionally, Gadour (2006: 173) suggests that fundamental issues with university education generally are that curricula are left to individuals, there are no teacher training policies, and class sizes are too large. Nor is there any link to allow a smooth transition between school and university (Elabbar, 2011). Rajendran (2010) attributes the low level of English language skills to a complete lack of exposure to the language outside the classroom.

This study is therefore intended to provide a comprehensive investigation of the issues involved in learning and teaching English in Libyan Higher Education, to explore how and why these issues are arising, and to suggest recommendations to resolve such issues.

### **1.3 Research Aims**

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the teaching of English in Libyan universities and the objectives of this research are:

1. To identify the importance of English language to Libyans;
2. To examine the teaching of English in Libyan Higher Education;
3. To investigate issues in learning English in Libyan universities;
4. To contribute to the understanding of successful English teaching;
5. To consider the impact of political change on English language teaching in Libyan universities.

### **1.4 Scope of Study**

The main study was carried out with university students learning English as a Foreign Language, university teaching staff and university management from one major Libyan university. This began in February 2011, just as Libya was about to enter into conflict resulting in a regime change. As the data was analysed, it became clear that a grounded theory approach was appropriate and this resulted in more interviews in Libya taking place in December 2011. It was also evident that an extra study was needed to contextualise the results, and further interviews were consequently carried out in the Netherlands with Dutch Higher Education students and teaching staff in June 2012. However, with the evolving political situation in Libya, the study required clarification of specific areas and more interviews were carried out with university staff in Libyan universities in October 2012.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this research is that it identifies issues in teaching and learning English in Libyan universities. It makes important recommendations of value to the development of

successful English language strategies in Libyan Higher Education. Most significantly, this research was carried out over a period of great change in Libya and it records from March 2010 to October 2012 the perceptions of interviewees before, during and after a time of political upheaval in the country. Moreover, it describes the difficulties of carrying out research in a country experiencing demonstrations, violence, and civil war.

## **1.6 Research Context**

The initial data collection was carried out in 2010 with around two hundred participants comprising both undergraduate and postgraduate students, teaching staff, university management and education inspectors from two public universities in Libya. This was followed by a survey of one hundred and twenty nine students and staff from one Libyan university in the early part of 2011. These were taken across six different colleges within the university. The sample included a mix of males and females, with a higher proportion of females. This is according to Education being more popular with females as teaching offers acceptable employment opportunities for them in the future. More than half the sample comprised students studying English as their major subject. The majority of the sample was under thirty six years old, with two thirds of these being under twenty six years of age.

Qualitative data was collected through interviews carried out in 2011 and 2012. These were from random sampling across two universities. Individual interviews and focus group interviews were carried out with students, teaching staff and university management.

## **1.7 Research Design**

The methods and methodology are discussed more fully in Chapter four. The methods selected for the research utilised a mixed methods approach, whereby the data from the quantitative methods were able to inform the data from the qualitative methods and vice versa. This enabled the data to be validated through triangulation (Denscombe, 2005). As mentioned above, both questionnaires and interviews were carried out and the same topic viewed from different perspectives allowed more understanding of the topic (Denscombe, 2005).

The methodology for this study began with a collection of cards to identify the perceived issues relating to English in Higher Education. Analysis of these resulted in the design of three questionnaires targeted at three different groups: students; teaching staff; and university management. Using a grounded theory approach, the analysis of data led to further information being collected through the use of individual and focus group interviews.

## **1.8 Chapter Outline**

Chapter two gives an overview of the Libyan education system and issues such as capacity building, the loss of English language skills, and other barriers to learning English. It explores the context within which the study takes place, in particular looking at the changes that are occurring in the country. This is to show the impact that political upheaval has had, and continues to have, on the teaching and learning of English in Libya. The chapter contributes to the fifth research question: What changes have been taking place in teaching English in Libya? It also contextualises the third research question: What are the challenges of learning and teaching English in Libyan universities?

Chapter three provides a critical analysis of relevant literature. It explores the theoretical framework for the study with a wider reference to the Arab world and other developing countries. It looks at quality issues in Higher Education, the role of teachers and student access in Arab countries. The chapter also discusses changes in Libyan universities, the building programme, the scholarship programme, and technology, all of which have been impacted by the civil war there. The effects of growth, educational resources and IT in Libyan Higher Education are also reviewed. The chapter further discusses traditional approaches to teaching, the use of non-native speakers of English, teacher training and the quality of teaching with reference to Libya. It describes how education has been politicised, the lack of support networks and motivation, and the impact of local culture on learning English.

Chapter four outlines the research approach, the development of the research tools, and the research methodology contextualised by the difficulties encountered in collecting data before, during and after political upheaval. It describes the mixed methods approach which

was utilised and the grounded theory methodology which underlies the whole study. The mixed methods used were a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches including questionnaires and interviews; however if the initial data collection and the differences in focus and individual interviews is taken into account, then this can be described as overall a multiple methods approach. The chapter details how the questionnaire was piloted in the UK to ensure validity, before being distributed in Libya. Sampling was from a homogenous group in a Libyan university and the chapter describes how several field trips to Libya were necessary in order to collect the required data. The chapter discusses the interviews and why further interviews took place in the Netherlands. It also discusses how a reflexive approach underlies the research process. This chapter helps to answer the fifth research question: What changes have been taking place in teaching English in Libya?

Chapter five is the first of the analysis chapters. It presents and discusses the findings relating to the first research question: How important is English language teaching in Libya? The chapter discusses the changing perceptions of English in Libya and draws upon comparisons in interviews with Europeans from Dutch Higher Education. Areas such as the curriculum, digital communication and its part in incentivising learners, class size and teaching quality are explored as they all have a role in measuring how important English language is to Libyans.

Chapter six provides the analysis of the findings related to the second research question: What are the challenges of teaching in Libyan universities? It investigates the challenges related to teaching at university level. The chapter explores the desired age to start learning English in schools, and how well prepared students are for entering university to study English. It investigates the background of the teachers in high schools and what they are expected to teach, the challenges experienced by university teachers in relation to curriculum and methodology, the impact of foreign nationals as teachers of English, and the suggestions the teachers have for improving the quality of teaching in the universities.

Chapter seven presents the results related to the third research question: What is the impact of environment on learning and teaching English in Libyan universities? This chapter explores the particular challenges of the material environment on students and teachers. It



investigates the resources available and the facilities provided, and then discusses how the environment may affect motivation.

Chapter eight presents the conclusions and the recommendations and answers the fourth research question: What factors would contribute to successful English language teaching and learning in Libyan Higher Education?

## **1.9 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the study and a brief description of the contents of each chapter. Underlying the whole study is the concept of change. The research was carried out over a period of rapid political change in Libya and this has impacted the study. Much of the work has been subjected to regular updating as the changes have come into effect. The literature review in Chapter two had previously covered the theoretical framework until new issues were uncovered and investigated, and then applied to the evolving situation.

*<sup>1</sup>Chapter three was the section which experienced the most revision as I had to make more field trips to Libya than had been envisaged. The initial data collection was carried out under normal circumstances in October 2010 during the Gaddafi regime, and I was comfortable with the environment and the two universities where the investigation began. My second visit in February 2011 should have been the final field study, and it had been well prepared beforehand. I arrived in Libya the day before the first demonstrations took place and most of my plans were not able to be implemented. For the first few days I tried to carry on as normal, but then the situation changed dramatically. A curfew was enforced, no gatherings were permitted, the universities closed down, and everyone was trying to leave the country as the continuing demonstrations were met with force by the government. I had great difficulty in finding an escape route from the country so that I could continue with my research studies. The interviews which should have taken place within the university surroundings were instead conducted surreptitiously and on an ad hoc basis as the*

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<sup>1</sup> This section has been written in a different font to indicate that it is the personal experience of the researcher in conducting the data collection.

*communication links were broken. They were also conducted in an atmosphere of fear which may have had an impact on the data.*

*My team in Libya continued to do their best in collecting questionnaires in these dangerous circumstances. I was aware that there were still many questions left unanswered when I analysed the data and I knew that I would need to return to Libya to carry out more research. It was not until the end of 2011 that I believed it was safe enough to go back to Libya. There were still no direct flights and entry was through Tunisia, and while I was in Libya that border was also closed because of violence. The situation was very volatile and yet I was still able to collect data, although this had to be done without raising suspicions. There was still evidence of civil war factions and it was difficult to assess the situation. Many of the young men still had guns and were prepared to use them against anyone they considered was against them. It was only in October 2012 that I was finally able to locate interviewees and collect the data I required for this study.*

The next chapter describes the overall Libyan context in which this study was carried out, both historical and contemporary, and discusses the education system as well as the political impact of changes on education.

## **Chapter 2 Context**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is to give some background to the education system in Libya in order to put into perspective some of the issues arising in teaching English as a Foreign Language in Libyan Higher Education. The education system tends to change periodically and it is often difficult to monitor these changes as currently there are limited resources for tracking the old and new structures.

The investigation will focus on issues related to political reasons, issues related to curriculum and teaching staff, and issues related to culture. In this way it will seek to provide an overview of some of the problems encountered in language teaching in Higher Education in Libya and offer some recommendations and suggestions to work towards resolving these problems which disrupt the teaching and learning process.

As the importance of English as a global language impacts on all nations, it is essential that Libya keeps at the forefront of any developments in language teaching and ensures that it is offering English language programmes which meet both the requirements of Libyan culture and the needs of the outside world. In this way Libya will be able to compete on an equal footing and not be kept in isolation.

Libya is a country under transformation and this chapter attempts to give some insight into the changes that are taking place. However, it is very early days and the country is far from stabilised, so this is still a work in progress.

### **2.2 Background**

Libya (The Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) was a country kept subdued by over four hundred years of colonisation by the Ottoman Turks and later by Italy, and the people were not given opportunities for education. In 1940 only 1% of the population could read and write (The National Report of the Great Libyan Jamahiria, 2008). However, in 1951 Libya was granted independence. At the time it was described as "one of the poorest and most backward nations of the world" (Mustafa et al, 2004).

It was not until the “September Revolution” of 1969 that education began to get special attention. This was the military coup that brought Gaddafi to power and there were immediate changes put into effect. One of the priorities was that education was the right of all Libyan citizens and it was made compulsory for all Libyans of both sexes to attend school between the ages of six and sixteen. This was enshrined in Article 14 of the 1969 Libyan Constitutional Declaration which states “Education is a right and a duty for all Libyans. It is compulsory until the end of the primary school.” (Otman and Karlberg, 2007: 127). This was the beginning of Libya entering the modern world and realising that its people were an asset.

The National Report of the Great Libyan Jamahiria (2008) states that the majority of Libyans today are educated to university or higher institute level (figure 1) and the CIA report (2010) confirms that 82.6% of the adult population are literate, although there is a differential between males at 92.4% and females at 72%.

University	Established	Location	Enrolment
Al-fateh	1957	Tripoli	75,000
Gar-yunis	1958	Benghazi	45,000
Seventh of April	1988	Az-zawyah	26,000
Omar El Mukhtar	1989	El-bida	12,000
Sebha	1983	Sebhah	9,000
Nasir (foreign students)	2001	Tarhuna	400
Mergeb (4 campuses)	1988	Khoms	18,000
Tahhadi	1988	Sirte	8,500
Graduate studies Academy (postgraduate studies)	1998	Tripoli	2,600

**Figure 1 - Libyan Public Universities**

*Source: British Council Libya Office, February 2004*

There is a lot of investment in education. The CIA (2010) reports indicate that only 2.7% of the GDP was allocated to education in 2002, the National Report (2008) shows that this was raised to 11.9% by 2007. This compares to 5.3% spent by the UK at the same time; the budget for UK education for 2010-11 was projected as just 5.6% of GDP (HM Treasury, 2007). However, Figure 2 shows the enrolment rates of school age students and the efforts being made to educate the population.

The challenges of educating young people and preparing them for the twenty-first century are taken very seriously by Libya and this is clearly stated in the education report presented in Geneva (The National Report, 2008); the statistics are impressive: in the academic year of 2007/2008 there were over one million students and one hundred and sixty-three thousand teachers. English teaching has also been acknowledged as thirty eight training courses took place for English language teachers and supervisors. According to a census taken in 2006 thirty-seven per cent of the Libyan population were engaged in study. In 2007 Libya had universal enrolment in primary education and ninety-four per cent secondary enrolment, while adult literacy had risen to eighty-seven per cent (AfDB, 2012).

Year	population	New enrolled students who are school age	New enrolled students of all ages	Apparent enrolment Rate AIR	Net Enrolment Rate NIR
2000-2001	123865	120349	123246	99.5	97.2
2003-2004	111706	108850	111483	99.8	97.4
2004-2005	113707	111092	113480	99.8	97.7
2005-2006	113612	111356	113488	99.9	98.9

Figure 2 - Education enrolment indicators in Libya (2005 - 2006)

Source: statistics of the General People's Committee for Education (2006)

The estimated population of Libya in July 2012 was given as 5.6 million with nearly 47 per cent being under the age of twenty five; the median age of the total population is a youthful 24.8 years (CIA, 2013a). Other estimates give the population as being 6.7 million and it is

difficult to get precise figures, especially as the country is now trying to stabilise, but the statistics agree that there is a very youthful population (Amry, 2012). This indicates the importance of education for the future of Libya. In comparison with Libya, the median age for the UK is 40.2 years, and only 30 per cent of the population is under the age of twenty five (CIA, 2013b).

There are signs that Libya is trying to come to terms with educating its young to reach internationally recognised standards, so that they will be able to find their place in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. Recently the European Union and UNICEF have funded a three million euro project to improve access to quality education in Libya (ENPI, 2013). The project will focus on teachers' qualifications, in-service teacher training, recruitment and management.

### **2.3 The Education System**

The education system takes two forms: public and private. Public education is mandatory and free for all Libyan citizens and is run by the Secretary of Education, responsible for all costs and expenses such as building schools, employing teachers and supplying schools with books and curricula. In contrast private schools are run by personal administration and students need to pay fees. There is however slightly more flexibility within the private sector, which can accept students at the age of five, compared to six in the public sector. It was only in the mid 1990s that private education was introduced and this is now being encouraged by the Educational Authority as it is considered a new concept for Libyan society. However, the majority of Libyans still choose public education as it is free and private education tends to attract those with higher incomes and fewer children.

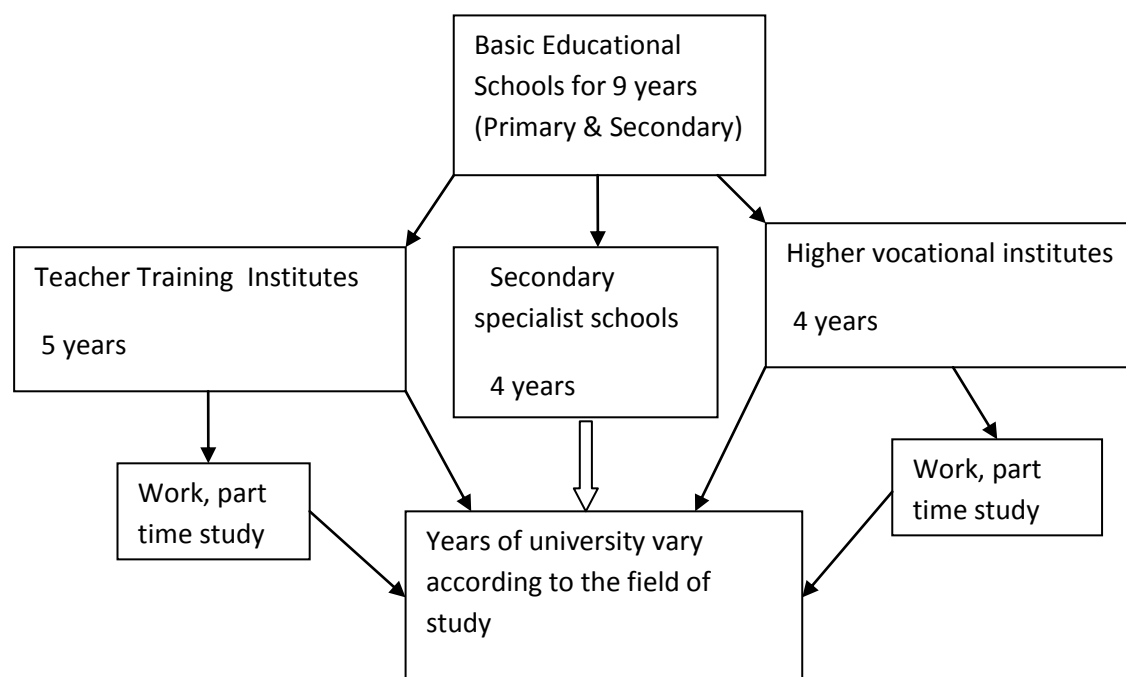
From 1975 there has been 9 years compulsory education for children aged 6 to 15 years: this consisted of primary schools for the first three years, and preparatory schools for a further six years. This was followed by secondary schools for three years and universities for four or five years. Teachers in the primary schools were mainly men, and the majority of teaching staff at university level were foreigners. This has now been changed and Libya has been undergoing changes since the 1980s in order to fulfil the demands of the twenty first century. The Advisory Committee for Educational and Training Planning (ACETP) proposed

that basic education should teach children to read, write and do arithmetic as well as give them cultural knowledge; at secondary level they should be taught moral principles, logic and to achieve basic education standards; whilst the goals of higher education were to acquire knowledge, conduct research and provide society with a well-qualified workforce (International Bureau of Education, 1998).

Since 2006 there have been three phases of education: children attend basic educational schools for nine years and it is noted that the majority of teachers in these schools has dramatically changed over the past twenty years and they are now predominantly Libyan females. These schools are divided up into 6 years at primary school followed by 3 years at general secondary school. Upon completion of this phase, students may be awarded a basic education certificate and they then have the choice of finding work or continuing in education.

The second phase of secondary school education from the age of sixteen has been lengthened to four years and is a preparation for higher education as students choose more specific and specialised areas of study. However, it is accepted that not all students are suited to academic studies and therefore vocational institutes serve the purpose of preparing young people for work. Figure 3 indicates the structure of the Libyan education system. After the free and compulsory basis education in primary and secondary schools, the choice then is between specialist secondary schools to study arts or science for four years and prepare for university, or for a more vocational route, which can also lead to higher education. Technical and vocational studies in science or engineering can be carried out for five years in teacher training institutes or four years in higher vocational institutes. Students can progress to higher degree courses from these institutes by continuing full-time education, or working part-time while they study.

Education continues to be free up to university level although post-graduate studies are subsidised (Hamdy, 2007). However, many students choose to take the work and part-time study route and the number of years they are at university will vary according to the mode of study and the subject they are studying. Figure 3 shows the routes to higher education.



**Figure 3** Changes in the Libyan education system

Today the numbers in education in Libya remain high and the level of literacy is impressive, with 95.6% of males and 82.7% of females over the age of fifteen being able to read and write, according to figures for 2010 (CIA, 2013a), but the figures tend to disguise the real purpose of education. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB) (2012), the curriculum is poor quality, the teachers are inadequately trained, and in addition the education system does not provide young people with the skills needed by the labour market, resulting in high unemployment. Nevertheless, there are ongoing plans to improve the educational system and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Libyan Government signed an agreement on 25 June 2013 to improve basic education by developing early learning standards and promoting teacher training and inclusive education (UN News Centre, 2013).

## 2.4 Changes in Libyan Higher Education

Libya is not insulated from the issues surrounding other Arab countries and the challenges being faced by students and teachers in Higher Education are the focus of this study. Many of these issues across the Arab world are discussed in the next chapter, but they generally relate to the demand for university education outpacing the existing supply. This places



undue stress on the infrastructure as there are not enough buildings and teachers to accommodate the numbers of students demanding university level education. Within Libya itself, physical, cultural and political changes are now transforming the Libyan landscape, especially since the collapse of the Gaddafi regime. Libya is an oil-rich country of some six and a half million inhabitants living mainly along the Mediterranean coastline of North Africa. It is the fourth largest country in Africa and nearly half the population is under the age of twenty five (UKTI, 2011). Higher education has shown unprecedented growth across the whole Arab region in recent years. Whereas there were no more than ten universities across the Arab states in 1950, this had expanded to more than two hundred some fifty years later (El-Hawat, 2007). The expansion of tertiary education is seen as a way of maximising a country's economic output (Bloom et al, 2006) and Libya is one Arab country which has invested heavily in education, resulting in the highest literacy rate in the Arab world (Rhema & Milisewska, 2010). However, even as early as the 1980s there was a shortage of qualified teachers (Oxford Business Group, 2008), and this has intensified as demand has exceeded supply; nor has this shortage been helped by the way that the training of teachers has been aggravated by a poor educational system, sanctions and low salaries. Education is free to all in Libya, from primary level through to university degree, but the Oxford Business Group (2008) is highly critical of the problems with quality: the curricula; the teachers; the educational infrastructure, and other structures.

There is no doubt that many of the quality problems relate to the surge in numbers of young people wanting to go to university. The National Report (2008) outlines the development of higher education in Libya which includes the establishment of twenty-four university compounds over a four-year period from 2008 – 2012: this is to meet the demand of student enrolments. The figures given for 2006 – 2007 were approximately 279,000 university students, anticipated to increase to half a million by 2025 (National Report, 2008). Rhema & Milisewska (2010) gives the current figure as more than 300,000 with an extra 90,000 enrolled in the higher technical and vocational sector, whereas the Tempus report (2011) shows about 340,000 enrolments. Although there may be a slight variation in numbers, it is evident that there is a growing demand for university places. Private universities are developing, although there is no tradition of privatisation of education in the Arab states. They are self-financed through students' fees and services provided to the

public (Tempus, 2011). Many of these institutions are being established in partnership with American or European universities (El-Hawat, 2007), although this is seen by many as being against the cultural values of Arab society with the suspicion that the students at such universities are being trained for jobs outside their own home country.

Higher education in Libya is available at both universities and vocational institutes. Within the universities, each Faculty has a committee with the Dean as chair and the Heads of Department as members, and each university manages its own budget (Rhema et al, 2010). Oxford Business Group (2008) argue that there is no effective top management and therefore no strategy, which leads to inconsistent standards across the country; they suggest this may be because regional committees have responsibility for education and communication between them is lacking. However, there is a will to improve and the new government is working with international support to find ways of going forward.

A recent initiative is the FOCUS project whose aim is to benchmark quality assurance in Libyan universities. Boldrini (2013: 14) reports the need for further educational reform for the quality of Libyan higher education “to meet the country’s modern needs and upcoming opportunities.” She highlights the current lack of personnel experience and internal mechanisms for benchmarking performance. Additionally, she identifies the lack of capacity and experience of top level management in the universities.

There are likely to be further changes and improvements as a result of co-operation between Libyan higher education institutes and other universities supported by the European Commission. The United States government is also looking at building partnerships between American and Libyan universities for collaborating on issues such as curriculum development, capacity building, infrastructure support and exchanges (Institute of International Education, 2011).

Political decisions in Libya have also had an impact on the educational resources available. English language was removed from the curriculum in the 1980s and the Oxford Business Group (2008) believe this left a generation of Libyans without vital international communication skills. All the English language books were removed from libraries and they were not replaced, therefore limited resources have been available to students (Oxford Business Group, 2008). There have been attempts at improving educational resources and

several initiatives have been taking place in Libya. One of these was sponsored by UNESCO and involved setting up Local Area Networks (LANs) within universities and using a Wider Area Network (WAN) to join the institutions (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010). The purpose of this initiative was to create digital libraries and make educational resources accessible to teachers and students in Higher Education.

English teachers should be viewed as a resource and should take on more challenging and multiple roles in order to encourage learner autonomy (Lianzhen He, 2003). They should also provide a wide range of resources and encourage students to take advantage of them (Fumin and Li, 2012). Autonomous learners are ultimately more motivated to learn.

## **2.5 Building Programme**

The building programme to accommodate the growing student numbers is substantial: UKTI (2011) estimates this at up to \$5 billion being spent on upgrading or building twenty eight campuses, an investment that would not have been possible a few years ago when Libya's isolation resulted in a limited exportation of oil, and there was no funding available for such expansion. Even in the desert areas these modern structures are emerging, and considerable development has gone into ensuring that they are built to withstand extremes of heat and cold. This has been made possible through collaboration with foreign organisations who have brought their expertise to projects, often helping to train Libyan engineers (Aecom, 2008). Although there is some uncertainty on the part of the construction companies in the current climate, there is also optimism that such programmes will continue in the future. The modernisation of university buildings is likely to become the expected norm for the tens of thousands of Libyans who have been on postgraduate scholarship programmes in countries like America, the UK and Australia, and who are unlikely to accept anything less than the standards to which they have become accustomed. There is still some way to go to get the existing buildings up to the expected standard but there is evidence of the universities being developed (McKinney, 2011), although this is currently on hold, due to recent events. Clark (2013) reports that many of the country's higher education colleges and technical institutes were damaged during the uprising and are

now empty shells. Gough (2013: 1) concurs, stating that many of the “university buildings are in a state of extraordinary disrepair.”

Libya is experiencing a transitional period in its history and the building programme encompasses much more than physical structures, although many of those now need to be rebuilt. However, it is a much wider development which now needs to be addressed. In order to ensure that Libya has future stability, there cannot be any dramatic changes (Al-Turk, 2011). The plans which were put in place under the old regime may take much longer to eventuate, or they may no longer be regarded as relevant. A building programme in Libya will require the development of new relationships and new processes, which were not there under the Gaddafi regime (Al-Turk, 2011). However, more opportunities will become available and there is likely to be a greater need for Higher Education and for English language skills.

To meet this demand Libya is continuing to invest in building programmes but Clark (2013) suggests there are significant hurdles in modernising the existing institutions, which he states are currently “bursting at the seams”. However, the country has excellent financial resources and is now in a position to upgrade its infrastructure, with the new government showing that it has the will to do this (Clark, 2013).

## **2.6 Scholarship Programme**

It was only in the mid 1990s that the policy of teaching and learning English was given greater emphasis (Aldabbus, 2008) and this has continued to develop. As discussed, the Libyan education system has undergone many changes but it is trying to modernise and prepare its population for competing with other nations on an equal basis. University education is carried out through the medium of English and therefore there is a need for teaching staff in Higher Education to be confident in using English. In 2003 the Libyan government began to reposition itself to be legitimised internationally and by 2009 full diplomatic relations had been restored with most countries, including the United States (Calhoun, 2012). It was in 2006 that plans were formulated to explore restarting and expanding scholarship programmes (Lazar, 2012), whereby university graduates were given opportunities for studying in English speaking countries and gaining their Master’s or doctorates in an environment where they could develop their English language skills.

This scholarship programme has shown huge growth in recent years and provides some understanding of the impact it has on the Higher Education establishments which have been deprived of graduates who would normally go into teaching positions in the universities. Only 33 Libyan students were studying abroad in 2002, but in the 2006/07 academic year there were 14,000 students studying outside the country, all on scholarships (Oxford Business Group, 2008). In January 2010 there were over 8000 Libyan students at UK universities (UKTI, 2011). The new Libyan government intends funding a further 10,000 students to study abroad in vocational and higher education institutes in addition to 31,000 students funded on one year English language courses (Custer, 2013a). Over the past few years this has meant that many of the university teaching staff have been away for up to five years and the universities have had to recruit foreign teachers, mainly from India or other Arab states.

However, there are now many opportunities for promising students or teachers to study in English speaking countries and gain their degrees in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and Canada where they can improve their skills and knowledge but more importantly develop their understanding of international cultures, and make contacts for the future. These graduates can then return to Libya and use their skills in Libyan Higher Education. Many are now teaching English in Libyan universities. In 2013 there was an agreement between Libya and the UK for exchanges and partnerships between the two countries and it is anticipated (Figure 4) that the UK will be receiving approximately £93 million out of the total Libyan scholarship budget of £371 million over the next four years (Phillips, 2013). The size of the budget indicates how serious Libya is in its determination to look to the future and provide its young people with the level of skills and knowledge required at international level.

	Total	UK share
PhD	£105.7 m	£10.3 m
Masters	£216.8 m	£50.2 m
Training (up to 1 year)	£48.8 m	£32.6 m
Total	£371.3 m	£93.1 m

Table 1: Budget for Scholarships 2013–17

Scholarships granted	
PhD	421
Masters	863
Expected scholarships and training	
PhD	524
Masters	1,800
Training	1,500

Table 2: Scholarships 2013–17

Figure 4 - Libyan scholarship programme (Phillips, EL Gazette February 2013)

Brown (2013) reports that the educational priorities for Libya appear to be bringing “stability and opportunity to the country” and suggests that Libya “is making the right steps towards making its university system internationally renowned.” It is also noted that the scholarships to English speaking countries are particularly popular and include the US, Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand (Lazar, 2012).

## 2.7 English Language

For many years the value of learning languages has been recognised and approved by Libyan society. As far back as the 1940s English, French and Italian were introduced into the schools and this reflects the position of Libya as a Mediterranean nation. Since this time English has increased in importance as an international language and it now forms an important part of the curriculum.

Arabic is the official language in Libya and it is noted that Libyans use both Italian and English in trade and business (Nassr et al, 2003). Many Libyans feel comfortable with Italian as much of the culture is still linked to the colonial past when Libya was a colony of Italy. However, English is becoming more prevalent with the young and “is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language – in over 100 countries” (Crystal, 2003: 5). One of the other motivations for English is that the latest publications and research in fields such as medicine and the sciences tend to be in English (Rugh, 2002). This is a trend across the whole Arab world and is not exclusive to Libya. That is not to say that it is always welcome and Abu-Melhim (2009) found that half of the Jordanian students interviewed had very negative attitudes towards learning English, despite recognising the benefits. This was

supported by Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari's (2012) study of Libyan secondary school students which found that some of the students showed negative behaviour in English classes and did not pay any attention to the English teacher; Abidin et al (2012: 124) suggest that "this could be due to the belief that learning English is not needed and important". However, this is in contrast to the British Council's Nic Humphries (2012), who argues that young Libyans see English as essential for their careers, especially in vocational fields such as engineering.

Within the last ten years more attention has been given to English language teaching. This may be as a result of Libya embracing the wider global community. It is also recognition of the fact that, due to the rapid development of modern life, there will be no chance for people to rely in future on their own national language. There is an increasing need to interact with foreign countries that share common interests, therefore learning and mastering an international language as a medium or link has become one of the prerequisites in today's world. English is regarded as the main language which facilitates international communication and, as Crystal (2000) argues, it is effective because it is spoken by nearly a quarter of the world's population.

## **2.8 Teaching of English**

The English language is significant as an international communication tool, and scholarships to English speaking countries are popular, therefore the teaching of English within Libya is once more gaining importance. Over the years there have been numerous changes in the curriculum for teaching English. Since the mid-1950s English had been taught in preparatory and in secondary schools using the translation method of learning vocabulary through reading; students at the teacher training colleges followed this same method and were at the same level as the preparatory students (Barton, 1968). A new project for teaching English began in 1965 and preparatory school teachers were trained ready for the introduction of a new "English for Libya" programme which was "designed primarily to build language skills and emphasize the learning of basic sentence patterns" (Barton, 1968). In 1968 English was established in the curriculum of primary schools and this met with approval from the majority of Libyan society. However, most of the teachers and inspectors

at that time were expatriates from the United Kingdom and the United States. Barton's (1968) report, commissioned to advise the Ministry of Education on how to raise the standards of English teaching in Libya, recommended that in-service training be implemented, even for the native English-speaking teachers; 90 school teachers were also sent to the UK and the US to improve their English.

After the Libyan Revolution in 1969 the teaching of English was taken off the primary school curriculum, as the priority was changed to focus on literacy (GPCE, 2010), yet it was kept on the curriculum at higher levels, from the age of 13 upwards, and there were still opportunities for English teachers from other countries to teach English in Libya, mainly in the private schools (Maghur, 2010).

In 1973 the Cultural Revolution in schools and universities was aimed at promoting student awareness of Arabic, their own native language. Major reforms were introduced and the English language textbooks were "Libyanised" to take into consideration the social, economic and political life of Libya; "the Living English for Libya textbooks included topics focusing on different aspects of Libyan life" (Orafi, 2008: 8). In the late 1970s the private sector was also outlawed and this stopped the teaching of English in "private Libyan schools which taught English language from the nursery upwards" (Maghur, 2010: 5). Finally, in 1985 the Education Authority decided to suspend English language teaching for basic and intermediate level students. English language resources were destroyed; "Students all over Libya were ordered to come out in large crowds and to burn many English school books" (Kreiba, 2012: 1).

It was not until 1991 that the Education Authority decided to reinstate the teaching of English in the curriculum for seventh year basic level students, and this was introduced into schools in 1992 (Asker, 2011). This coincided with a government initiative in 1992 aimed at replacing foreign teachers with local Libyan teachers in the space of five years, which Ghanem (2006) argues resulted in poorly qualified teachers and low quality teaching standards. Additionally, teacher status was low and many students preferred to seek other employment; individuals working in the public sector had the same level of salary for about twenty years dating from the 1980s (Elmajdon, 2004).



The Education Authority conducted another review in 2005 and English was made a compulsory subject for students in their third year, with children at nine years old. However, there had to be major changes to the old curriculum as it was so out of date. It was then an opportunity to modernise and design syllabuses and textbooks which met the needs of the learners in the modern world. Whereas the traditional view had focused on grammar and methodologies such as translation and audio and were more teacher directed, they began to be replaced by the communicative approach. However, this has not always been taken up by the more traditional teachers and outdated methodology is still prevalent in most schools.

Although the new version of the curriculum is based on interactive and communicative approaches, there is still great resistance to this from the teaching staff. The curriculum recommends that English be used as much as possible in the classroom by both teachers and students (Orafi, 2009) but, as this study will show, students confirm that Arabic is still being used in the English language classroom. This may well be a matter of confidence on the part of the teachers and more training may improve the situation; Orafi (2009) describes the training to support communicative approaches and implement this new curriculum as being very limited. As Orafi (2009) points out, the training sessions were led by inspectors who had been trained by the publishers of the course books and consisted of one week of seminars showing the new textbooks and giving information about the curriculum. Nevertheless, there is still a shortage of qualified teachers who can deliver this curriculum as most teachers graduated from teacher training institutes some time ago and they have not updated their practice. Additionally, their own spoken communication skills are undeveloped and present a challenge to implementing a communicative approach (Orafi, 2009).

There are effective teaching materials in Libyan schools and much investment has gone into the production of textbooks which follow the communicative approach. The issue is that many of the teachers prefer to use methods familiar to them from their own learning days and these beliefs are difficult to change (Inozu, 2011). Although McDonough & Shaw (1996:8) argue that the resources available to the teacher influence motivation, it is important to recognise the need to be able to use these resources to maximum effect. In secondary schools the teaching of English is mainly carried out by Libyan teachers who were

educated and trained in Libya. Their exposure to English has been very limited and there have been few opportunities for practising communication in the English language, despite the main objective of teaching English in Libyan schools stated as being able to use the language and communicate effectively with the outside world (Fleming, 2003). Furthermore, Shihiba (2011: 17) found that the Teacher's Book given to secondary school English teachers used language and terms which were both "difficult and complex for the teachers to understand".

The secondary school stage is the most critical and important stage, especially for those progressing to Higher Education, and the skills the students achieve here are essential for their development. Apart from the lack of well qualified teachers, there are other barriers that also have an impact on the teaching of English, such as large classes, a shortage of equipment and classroom space. For some years there have been gestures towards developing the quality of teaching English in Libyan schools, including the provision of modern facilities (GPCE, 2008), but Alhmali (2007: 190) found that there was a lack of computers and language labs in the schools. These may well be addressed but they are taking valuable time. Modern technology may be a solution but teachers are not yet trained to use this. There are measures being put in place to ensure inclusive education but there are still big gaps in the implementation of e-technology and the use of the internet for learning. Abidin et al (2012) have suggested that internet access should be made available in all schools and that an adequate number of computers should be provided for teachers and students.

Libyan society is very traditional and there are cultural issues relating to the influence of families on their children and there is seen to be a lack of encouragement from parents towards embracing modern ideas of learning. Female teachers predominate in the schools and yet they are restricted in their access to computer courses; their families would not allow them to go to internet cafes for training in the use of ICT in teaching English (Abidin et al, 2012).

## **2.9 Summary and Conclusion**

The Libyan education system has undergone many changes but it is trying to modernise and prepare its population for competing with other nations on an equal basis. However, there are barriers to the implementation of this goal, some of which may not be exclusive to Libya.

The next chapter will give a wider view of the literature available which relates to the modernisation of nations in the Arab states and how they approach education and English language teaching. It will also look at findings from others on the methodology of English language teaching, political issues, curriculum and teacher training issues, cultural issues and student motivation.

## **Chapter 3 Literature Review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews some of the issues that are relevant to teaching English in Higher Education, with special reference to the particular challenges encountered in the Arab world, so that this study can be contextualised. The changes that have occurred in Libya, and the impact of these on the educational system, are then considered, especially the unprecedented growth of demand for university places. The issues that confront countries faced with such demand for tertiary education are in many ways self-evident, but the main concerns such as lack of resources, teaching methodology, the educational systems of the Arab world, cultural factors, and teaching staff are addressed. The literature relating to all of these informs this study, in particular because there is little research on the specific context of Libyan Higher Education.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points made by existing literature and the implications these have for this study.

### **3.2 Quality Issues in Higher Education in the Arab world**

Today, most people agree that English is an international language (Crystal 1999). Educators consequently recognise the value and importance of teaching English as a second language for many developing countries such as Libya, but also need to be aware of some of the issues in teaching the language. Al-Khwaiter's (2001) study of university education in Qatar raises issues which appear to be particular to the Arab world and Sahraoui (2008) confirms this, finding that the issues diagnosed in Arab universities are consistently found to be centralized governance, a weak production of knowledge, a lack of independent vision, inadequate curricula and declining quality.

A report from the United States (Congress, 2007) finds that the most significant challenge to education in the Arab world is the decline in quality. It highlights several issues, the most important being design of the curriculum and the lack of professional standing of teaching staff. The curriculum is thought not to encourage free critical thinking, but instead is

considered too focused on submission, obedience, subordination, and compliance. Factors deemed to have an adverse effect on teachers' capabilities are: low salaries resulting in teachers needing to take on extra jobs; lack of facilities; poorly designed curricula; indifferent quality of teacher training; and overcrowded classes. These factors tend to devalue the work being carried out by teachers, and lower their professional standing in their local community.

Herrera & Torres (2006) suggest that a primary reason for the poor quality of academic production in the Arab world is that universities tend to be located within authoritarian systems which impede academic freedom. Additionally, with religion and education being so closely linked, it creates a problem for more enquiring minds: people simply do not believe in scientific research and Mustapha Kamel El-Sayed from Cairo University claims that seventy five per cent of what Egyptians read is about religion (Herrera & Torres, 2006). Mougith (2006) argues that the teachers themselves have no curiosity about the world, so they mechanically transmit information to students within a packed curriculum, and this is done in a disinterested and unimaginative way. Consequently, Mougith (2006) suggests that this stifles a love of learning in children and they never recover from this; it becomes a vicious circle whereby they then may become teachers themselves and take on teaching responsibilities, transmitting information in the same way they learnt. This approach is of course not confined to the Arab world, but in Western countries there is more opportunity to review practice, due to regular inspection structures and assessment processes. Quality assurance of teaching tends to be given more importance in the latter than across the Arab world.

However, there is more emphasis being placed on quality of education in the United Arab Emirates, which recognises that its future development depends on a well-educated workforce (Schoepp, 2011). As Collins (2005) argues, the quality of its staff will ultimately determine the quality of the university. The UAE has a particular problem, given its lack of human resources which results in more than eighty per cent of the country's population being foreign (Schoepp, 2011). Some of the universities have virtually no Emirati teaching staff and are reliant on expatriate expertise, but they face challenges in retaining these people, as their level of commitment may be questionable (Richardson & McKenna, 2002).

However, retention of quality teaching staff remains one of the key factors in providing quality education in universities (Schoepp, 2011).

Al Omari, Adayleh et al (2011) concur with the argument that the teaching staff determine the quality of Higher Education and suggest that it is the role of the university staff to develop creativity in students, which will enhance the quality output from Higher Education establishments. However, Al Tahrawi (2007) argues that the large number of students in classes, insufficient resources, current events, as well as a lack of motivation in students can all have a negative impact on creativity and ultimately quality.

### **3.3 The Role of Teachers**

#### **3.3.1 The Teacher's Status**

Despite the esteem being placed on the quality of university teaching staff, the low salaries paid to teachers do not always reflect the value of educating the young. Teachers' pay is often so low that they are forced to take on extra work in order to survive (Herrera & Torres, 2006). One teacher in Saudi Arabia complained of receiving a monthly salary of just 2000 riyals<sup>2</sup>, which equates to around £340; this is the same as a domestic servant is paid<sup>3</sup>. Economists state that there is an increasing gap between salaries and the cost of living in the Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> In Libya there are also issues on the level of teachers' salaries; Linvill (2013) reports that during the Gaddafi regime "salaries were kept low to the point that many faculty members had to hold multiple jobs". This means that teachers trying to supplement their salary by taking on extra jobs do not have time to prepare lessons, or think about what they are going to be teaching their students the next day. One of the most popular extra jobs for teachers is that of a private tutor. Naguib (2006) believes this growing demand for private education in Egypt is an indictment of the educational system as teachers are forced to give private lessons to supplement their earnings; however, the reason so many students need extra lessons is because they are not being taught satisfactorily in the schools. This is because the teachers are not delivering lessons which meet the needs of their students as they do not have the time nor motivation to do so.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.edarabia.com/26031/school-teachers-in-saudi-arabia-still-await-official-action-on-pay-hike/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.expattarrivals.com/saudi-arabia/cost-of-living-in-saudi-arabia>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=20120220117923>

### **3.3.2 The Teacher as Authoritarian Figure**

A teacher-centred or authoritarian approach is common across the Islamic world and Biggs (1995) describes a teaching environment where the teacher is regarded as a “father figure” and students should respect his authority; nor are they expected to question that authority (Biggs, 1995). Harber (2004) also explains that such an authoritarian learning context means figures of authority are revered and students are taught not to question traditional sources of knowledge. Knowledge is disseminated through authority: there is no expectation that students will analyse information and come to their own conclusion (Hanaan, 2009). However, this paternal, autocratic style is seen as caring (Deary, 2008) and Saad (2006: 83) quotes a student as saying “a good teacher is kind to us, solves our problems, cares about us.” In the United Arab Emirates university staff are expected to be cheerful, helpful and caring and the students prefer strong, visible leadership (Deary, 2008).

This presents a dilemma if students are confronted with any approach which seems to deviate from this perception of the teacher being in control. Studies have shown that when students perceive their teacher as caring, then achievement and behaviour is enhanced (Rubie-Davies et al, 2010). However, although quality teachers must be able to demonstrate a caring approach, they must also be able to use a variety of teaching methods to meet the learning needs of their students (Okpala & Ellis, 2005) and there would seem to be too much emphasis on teacher-centred, lecture-style instruction in the Arab classroom to the detriment of more active participation, where students would learn more (Weaver & Qi, 2005). Additionally, several studies point to student learning being further enhanced by interaction between academic staff and students outside the classroom (Weaver & Qi, 2005; Bjorklund et al, 2004; Lee & Ravizza, 2008). The development of caring relationships and teaching is improved when experiences such as fieldwork and coursework are carefully designed, and establishing personal relationships both in and out of the classroom helps the teacher have more understanding of the needs of the student (Lee & Ravizza, 2008). The activities and interaction of academic staff inside as well as outside of the classroom have a direct effect on student engagement (Chen et al, 2008).

### **3.3.3 The Teacher’s Influence**

According to Alkhawaldeh (2010), the challenges faced in teaching English across the Arab world are consistent: these are motivation, large classes, low achievement rates, insufficient

time to teach curriculum, and teacher training. When teachers in Jordan were surveyed, they responded that their workload was the main challenge for them, followed by class size, and then the low achievement rates for their students for which they were blamed (Alkhawaldeh, 2010). These are issues which require fundamental changes in the way education and teachers are perceived, and which have an impact on the ability of Arab students to reach their potential in a global world context.

There are also other challenges from the teacher's perspective. Sakui and Cowie (2012) report that teachers regard their own perceived shortcomings, aligned with an incompatibility between them and their students, as being key features which cause difficulties in motivating learners. Whilst they may take on the responsibility for their learners' motivation, Sakui et al (2012) point out that there are external and internal factors which limit their influence. Teachers are not in a position to change external factors such as class sizes, students' abilities, and compulsory courses, but they may be able to influence internal factors such as learner beliefs and teacher-student relationships (Sakui et al, 2012).

The attitudes of teachers towards their classroom practice are also impacted by previous experiences, as Inozu (2011) recognises in her study, finding that "the framework of the key beliefs of the participants surprisingly remained the same, most of the time in the form of uncertainty". It is suggested that teachers' attitudes is an area which has not been well researched (Karavas-Doukas, 1996) and yet such attitudes have a significant impact on teaching approaches and ultimately motivation. As Atkin (1996: 6) argues that "we have a tendency to do what was done to us without consciously clarifying and making explicit our values and beliefs". This implies that teachers will try to replicate the teaching approaches familiar to them when they were students.

Yeung (2009) believes that teachers act as motivators in the classroom, and the way that they perform in teaching influences the learning and motivation of their students. Teachers should consequently try and meet their learners' different needs (Stipek, 2002) and set realistic yet challenging goals for these individual learners (Taylor, 2002). Ultimately, they should be providing a supportive environment, which is in itself a motivating factor (McDonough, 2007). It is interesting that a study by Feldman (1993) found that students did not place as much importance on teachers motivating them as had been expected.



Teachers themselves give more weight to developing motivation, whereas students simply want interesting lessons (Shishavan and Sadeghi, 2009).

This may also depend on the age and expectations of the students. Weinstein's (2010) study of university students found that the most important factor in motivating them was the professor's knowledge, yet this was not so important to younger students. According to Brown (2001), effective and successful teaching of English depends on the language proficiency of the teacher, their teaching skills, their communication skills and their personality. Other factors include a passion for the language, enthusiasm, a positive attitude and motivation (Ruiz-funes, 2002), and an ability to inspire and enthuse (Huang, 2010). It is also suggested that the teaching style used can be motivational (Wright, 1987). There are consequently a number of different factors related to the teacher which may have an influence on the learning motivation of students.

The teacher is therefore key to the way in which learners perceive the subject they are taught. Due to the prevailing political situation in Libya, Libyan students have been impelled to learn English as an academic subject as they have very little exposure to English native speakers (Al Moghani, 2003). Teachers of English in secondary schools are invariably Libyan and their level of proficiency in the English language may not always give confidence in encouraging and motivating their students as they tend to focus on low level skills. McDonough and Shaw (1996) suggest that factors influencing teachers' passion for teaching English relate to their status, their training, their attitudes, experience and expectations.

If expectations are set too low by the teacher, then the learners will not have the incentive to improve. This self-fulfilling prophecy was described by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), who suggested that, when teachers expect their students to do well, then they interact with them in such a way that leads to those expectations being fulfilled. Equally, as Rubie-Davies, Peterson et al (2010) reported, "students were considered vulnerable when teacher expectations were low, since it was perceived that student self-belief declined in such a situation and with that came a corresponding decline in performance". The role of the teacher must therefore acknowledge that setting high expectations results in better outcomes (Sorcinelli, 1991) as students can be motivated to achieve through high expectations (Basu & Middendorf, 2004).

### **3.4 Student Access to Technology**

With Arab countries facing problems in providing sufficient resources to meet the demand for access to Higher Education, various strategies have been suggested. One of these has been the Arab Open University, and this has had limited success in opening opportunities to a wider range of students, but the main preference from younger people is still face-to-face instruction (Zakari & Alkhezzi, 2010). Nevertheless, it has enabled older people to access Higher Education and is seen as a way of providing access to those in remote areas. However, Gulati (2008) argues that such technology may continue to widen the educational gap as there are so many difficulties in accessing information and communication technology in environments of political instability, such as the Middle East.

#### **3.4.1 Computer Access**

Statistics from data collated in 2003 showed that there were only eighteen computers per thousand people in the Arab world as opposed to a global average of seventy-eight per thousand (Rupp, 2009). In 2007 Western Europe had five times as many computers as the Middle East and North Africa countries, with five hundred and forty-eight per thousand compared to one hundred and seventeen per thousand in the Arab countries (Karlson, 2011). With the availability of cheaper machines in developing countries, computers become more accessible, but the gap between Arab countries and the countries of Western Europe is still significant. Stamboliyska (2013) reports that several countries in the Arab world still offer limited student access to ICT (information and communication technology); in Egypt an average of one hundred and twenty students share one computer at primary school. Internet access is even more limited with four hundred and forty-one pupils at Egyptian primary schools sharing one computer with internet access (Stamboliyska, 2013). There may be wider access to the internet through internet cafes and broadband, although this does not always translate into access for educational usage. The Unesco (2013) report demonstrates the challenges of providing computer access in schools across five Arab states (Figure 5) and the more limited access to the internet (Figure 6). Whilst Egypt may have the lowest access, the other countries have not yet managed full integration of ICT in education, although this is regarded as essential for young people for their future skills and knowledge;

“Improved access to ICT in education can help individuals to compete in a global economy by creating a skilled work force and facilitating social mobility” (Unesco, 2013).

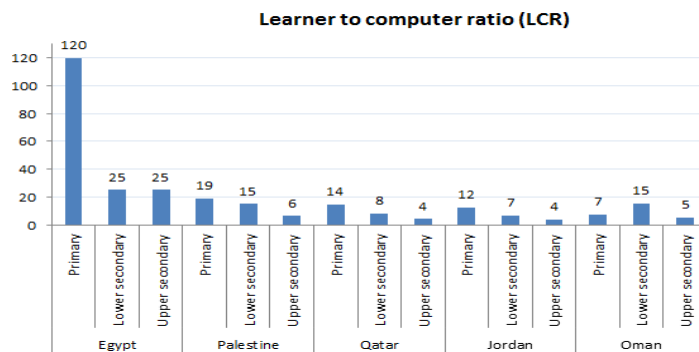


Figure 5 - Access to computers

Source: Unesco Institute for Statistics, 2013

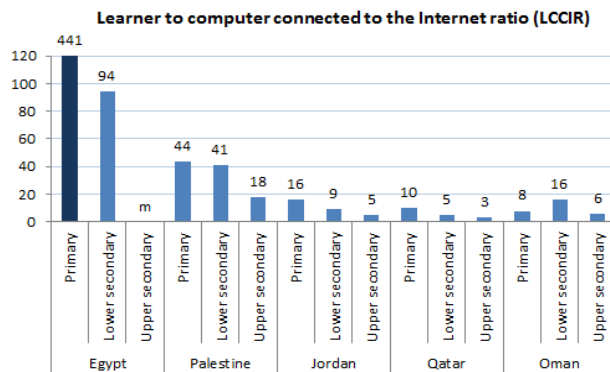


Figure 6 - Access to the Internet

Source: Unesco Institute for Statistics, 2013

A decade ago, Azzam (2002) suggested that Arab countries needed to develop the infrastructure to support a new economy of accessible internet and reduced telecommunication costs, and in order to do this they also needed to place more emphasis on computer-literacy and English teaching from a young age. He argues that Arab teachers need to train their students on how to think, not what to think; that they should teach innovation and creativity, rather than memorization and conformity. This would indeed require a complete change in the way of thinking in Arab countries and would likely meet with much resistance from the holders of traditional values. However, change has been happening across the region and this change may also be positive, led by the young population. The main challenges in Libya are in the infrastructure, the costs, the lack of expertise, the lack of management systems, attitudes and the low level of English, which is essential for using technology for e-learning: and although Libya has the highest literacy rate

in the Arab world, and the government was previously investing in the reconstruction of the education system (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010), these plans to upgrade and introduce ICT into the country have suffered a setback due to the recent political instability. It is too early to assess the impact as the changes in Libya have not yet resulted in new strategies and ways forward.

### **3.4.2 Using Information Communication Technology**

However, in many of the Arab states it has been demonstrated that young people do have informal access to ICT tools, albeit informally. The use of mobile phones and the internet to communicate was evident during the 'Arab Spring', which, as it is observed, far "surpassed the current capacity within the educational system and schools" (Unesco, 2013). It is also noted that the young people most disadvantaged economically or geographically will be the ones who continue to be deprived by a lack of formal access to learning experiences using ICT tools (Unesco, 2013). Condie and Munro (2007) argue that there is evidence that ICT has an impact on motivation and independent learning, plus enables better conceptual understanding; they also indicate that learning a language has "benefited greatly from the increased availability of online resources". These are all areas which may be expected to play a role in a student's preparedness for university, and which could even determine their eventual level of attainment. Although computers and technology have changed approaches to education in recent years, language learning materials developers are nevertheless advised that they should take care when using technology (Mukundan and Nimehchisalem, (2011). There is a belief that multimedia classrooms become more attractive and engaging and thus add to motivation levels (Mukundan et al, 2011). However, multimedia technology can actually give the impression of a lecture rather than a lesson (Mukundan, 2008) and may not always be appropriate for language learning.

In the modern technological world, the introduction of ICT has opened up new opportunities but Paterson (2005) argues that the management of costs and expenditure in Higher Education establishments has been a challenge, due to the fact that technology is constantly changing and can be disruptive. However, this is one of the areas which is needed to support teaching programmes, and the internet does offer opportunities to interact with other establishments. Good and effective management of the resources is essential for satisfaction rates and motivation levels to remain high. In Dearing's (1997)

report on education in the UK, one of the recommendations was that universities develop computer-based learning materials although Keiser (2006) finds that many are not making use of the valuable resources online, especially for learning English. She does point to some establishments where they are using a mix of distance learning and face-to-face workshop sessions, which are providing a high level of student satisfaction. It seems that some institutions are creating barriers, when perhaps the solutions are already in place. However, Abdallah & Albadri (2011) argue that the Arab culture is more slow-paced than Western society and the values are different: people favour face-to-face interaction and consequently there is a certain resistance to receiving messages electronically. They also concur that the progress of countries in the Middle East and North Africa region is hampered by political and social instability. This may be one of the reasons why the long-term plans for investing in education and technology in these countries are liable to change. Nevertheless, while there may be opposition politically to permitting access to the internet and global information, there is still strong support from the predominantly young population.

### **3.4.3 Accessing Learning**

Zakari and Alkhezzi (2010) argue that access to quality higher education should be available to all individuals, as this is a way of improving society. As mentioned earlier, distance education may seem to be one solution but in developing countries there are a large number of other issues which need to be addressed before it can be seen as a success; these include social relevance, political, quality assurance, infrastructure, and high quality student achievement (Belawati, 2005; Siaciwena, Trewby & Anderson, 2005; Belawati & Zuhairi, 2007). Additionally, there needs to be more access to technology before this could be considered and accepted as a learning tool, and Arab societies would need to be persuaded. There is still a generation gap as Libyan families are very traditional in their approach and there are issues with the reluctance to embrace technology (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010) but attitudes and behaviours are slowly changing. This may be in part due to the scholarship programme which has enabled families with young children to experience for themselves the communication and interaction advances related to Western technology. Libyan children in English speaking schools are embracing a new culture and may not be so resistant to technology in the future. With the internet giving greater

autonomy to individuals, this is likely to result in a change of mindset with both teachers and students demanding more of each other. Rhema & Miliszewska (2010) find that the level of English skills in Libya is low and this has an impact on the use of technology as most of the learning resources are in English.

Nevertheless, across the Arab world it has been a challenge to find solutions to accessing learning, as soaring demand for university places exceeds the space available to accommodate them. Higher Education students in the Arab world doubled between 1980 and 1990 (Al-Rashdan, 2009). This has put enormous pressure on existing resources, and is likely to be one of the main factors in the decline in quality seen in the Arab universities. The use of ICT may prove to be a way of providing better quality education as well as enhancing the learning experience of students in higher education. However, looking at the low number of computers available to the population (Rupp, 2009), it seems that there is still a lot to be done before Libya becomes a computer literate country. This may improve with the new regime but, as the country is still in a transitional period, much depends on where the priorities are judged to be. There are signs that Libya is aware that computers are essential in the modern world, as one of the initiatives has been the introduction of one hundred and fifty thousand computers into five thousand computer labs, and a project to link establishments using telephone lines, satellites and wireless communications (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010).

There are still likely to be challenges to students accessing technology in universities as, according to Elzawi and Wade (2012), there is resistance from many Libyan academics to the benefits of ICT; proficiency in English is a barrier, although the main issues were lack of internet access and low connectivity. Internet penetration was only 14 per cent in 2010, yet mobile phone penetration has increased in Libya from one per cent in 2001 to 171 per cent in 2010 (Jones et al, 2012). Figure 7 shows the internet usage and mobile phone penetration across the Middle East and North African countries in 2011/2012. It illustrates the extent of mobile phone connectivity against internet penetration.

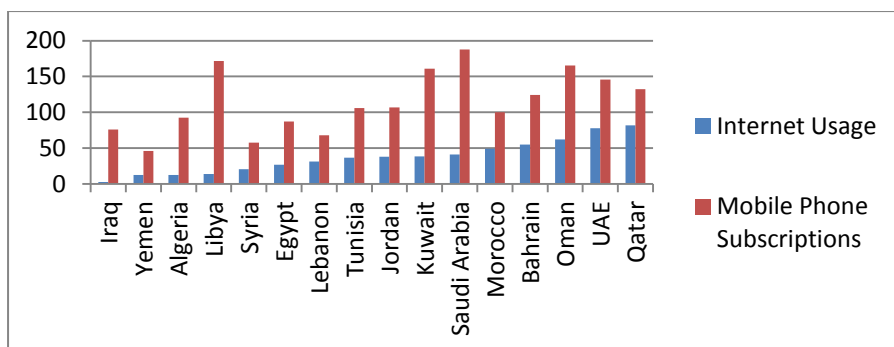


Figure 7 - ICT Connection across MENA states Source: ITU, 2012

Additionally, many studies indicate that a lack of training in technology is a serious issue for teachers (Beaver, 1992; Ingram, 1992; Yaghi, 1997; Yildirim & Kiraz, 1999) and indeed that teachers are less likely to use computer technology than other professionals (Paprzycki & Vidakovic, 1994). Alghazo (2006) finds that university teachers in the UAE complain that they do not have enough time, they lack adequate technical support, and the new equipment is unfamiliar to them, all of which have an impact on their attitude towards using technology in the classroom.

### 3.5 Effects of Growth

#### 3.5.1 Foreign Universities

Making the most of technology may be one way of providing access to education, as there is a lack of suitable accommodation for learners. Although facilities are being upgraded at enormous cost, it seems that the building programmes across all the Arab countries cannot keep up with the demand from increasing student numbers. Sawahel (2011) reports that private universities make up about forty five per cent of all Arab higher education institutes, yet they are still making little effect on the development of quality universities in the area. Many of the private universities are foreign and have been set up to accommodate Arab students without the same controls that they would have in their own countries (Sawahel, 2011). Wilkins and Huisman (2012) suggest that foreign universities have seen developing countries as a way of increasing their revenues outside the regulatory framework and constrictions placed on them by their own governments. However, there are high risks involved, especially where there is a lack of cultural understanding, and many prestigious Western universities prefer to keep their elite status in their own home campuses (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012). Foreign universities are often permitted to set up only in remote educational cities as this is seen as a way of protecting Arab society from foreign influences,

but this is not inhibiting local students from enrolling (Romani, 2009). Yet this is having a detrimental effect on other poorer Arab countries such as Egypt, as Middle Eastern students, who were previously attracted to Egyptian universities, are beginning to choose the foreign campuses in the Gulf States instead (Romani, 2009).

### **3.5.2 Foreign Partnerships**

In finding a solution to overcrowding, Fergany (2000) recommended that student intake be reduced in order to improve teaching and research capacities and equipment, recognising that Arab states could not cope with the increase in demand brought about by population growth and inadequate financial resources (El-Hawat, 2007). Although this may seem to be a sensible plan, there is likely to be little political favour for this solution. The 'Arab Spring' has made all governments nervous that reducing opportunities, rather than increasing them, may cause political unrest. In Libya the new government is looking to build partnerships with UK universities, but there are currently no plans to build foreign campuses (Libya Herald, 2013). Evans (2009:1) pointed out that "Tripoli has embarked on the world's largest university building programme to encourage the next generation of students to choose to study and work at home rather than overseas". That was under the previous regime, but it is unlikely that the concept of providing suitable education facilities for their own young people will change. Plans are going ahead with new constructions; a new university for 25,000 students is being built in Benghazi and is due to open in four years time (Prima Civitas, 2013). It may take time for the student numbers to be comfortably accommodated in their own premises, as many of the projects that started in 2008 were abandoned and are now dependent on government approval to proceed (NCE, 2012). The new government has been eager to start on redevelopment projects, and have been organising summit meetings at ministerial level to provide information on these investments (Infrastructure & Construction Libya, 2013).

### **3.5.3 Study Abroad**

As discussed earlier, technology is one of the skills needed to boost the economy in Arab states, and many students have been encouraged to study abroad in order to gain the skills which will allow them to create wealth (Rugh, 2002); their study has been funded by Arab governments and Libya is no exception. Scholarship programmes sponsored by the Gulf states and Libya have enabled many thousands to travel to countries like America, Canada,



Australia and Britain to improve and develop their skills and knowledge. Fergany (2000) believes that courses need to be flexible to reflect the needs of both students and the country: in other words, he feels that there should be an aspect of the “lifelong learning” approach introduced, where individuals are being prepared for specific requirements; the nature of these requirements would be subject to review and reflect both global and local needs. This would then encourage graduates as they would more easily be able to find suitable employment and value their education (Fergany, 2000); it would also raise quality as the students became more demanding. However, as Rugh (2002) argues, most graduates want to work in government positions rather than in the private sector; the government sector is already over-staffed, but the private sector needs these skills. The dilemma is that those who accept scholarships to study abroad are required to return to their home countries and work for the government which has funded their study.

#### **3.5.4 Unemployment**

The large student numbers accepting these scholarships to study abroad does allow some respite for the governments as it creates jobs to fill the vacancies left while these students are abroad, perhaps for four years on a PhD course. However the focus is on creating jobs in the private sector to address the challenges of such widespread unemployment in the Arab world; IFC (2011) reports that over the next ten years the Middle East and North Africa states need to create at least 50 million extra jobs to maintain unemployment rates at the global average of 6.2 per cent. Youth unemployment presents an even greater challenge as can be seen in Figure 8. Consequently efforts are being made to provide specific training programmes for young people which prepare them for the available jobs, as the education they have received has not given them the right skills; only one third of new graduates have the requisite skills for work (IFC, 2011).

**EXHIBIT 2 YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE ARAB WORLD IS THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD – DESPITE HAVING THE LOWEST PARTICIPATION RATE**

Youth unemployment rate\* percent, 2010

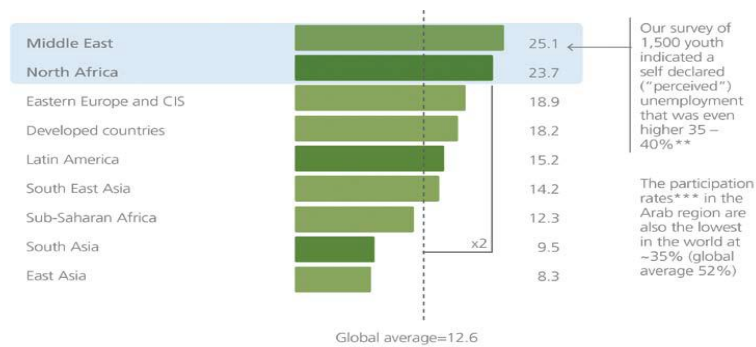


Figure 8 - Youth unemployment rates Source IFC, 2011

## 3.6 Teaching in MENA (Middle East & North Africa)

### 3.6.1 Teaching Style

Al-Humaidi (nd) suggests that the style of teaching across the Arab world is a major barrier to creating free thinkers and motivated learners. This is mainly the lecture method which does not encourage any discussion or dialogue; it depends on memorisation (Sahraoui, 2008) and this lack of interaction between teacher and student limits both the teaching and the learning that is taking place. Good teaching depends on getting feedback from the students so that the lesson can be targeted to their needs, and learning requires activities or reflection so that there can be understanding of what is being taught. Aldabbus (2008) also finds the method of teaching in the Libyan primary schools problematic as she describes a mechanical process of learning which is aimed solely at passing exams and moving onto the next stage; this is based on memorisation and repetition, and students are both unmotivated and reluctant to participate.

### 3.6.2 Pressures

Orafi (2008) explains the way Libyan family pride is involved in gaining top marks in exams and therefore it is the teacher's role to get students to pass, otherwise they are regarded as being responsible for failure. This places enormous pressure on both students and teachers, and consequently they remain focused on passing exams rather than a broader education. The culture of education in Libya is fixed on the subject rather than the methodology and

there is a perception that teachers should know everything; this means that they may actively discourage questions in case they do not know the answers and they may be predisposed not to deviate from anything other than the most traditional methods (Orafi, 2008). There is a lot of pressure from families and parents are more likely to place blame on teachers if their children do not succeed and a different approach has been used. In their study of Malaysian students, Ming, Ling and Jaafar (2011) find that the students are more extrinsically motivated to learn English but this is limited to self-interest and is not dependent on family praise or expectations. However, Epstein (1998) argues that encouragement and interest from parents can affect children's achievement.

### **3.6.3 Student-Centred**

Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) see that there is still too much teacher-centred control in Higher Education and they find that formative assessment is regarded as the teacher's responsibility. They favour a student-centred approach where the learner takes on more responsibility for managing their own learning; this would require a fundamental change in the way that university teaching is regarded as they suggest that students are given comments on their work, not grades, that they are allowed to resubmit work, that they understand their learning goals and are provided with documented information on assessment criteria, that they are given opportunities for reflection, provided with timely feedback and corrective advice, and directed towards their goals. In return this would then provide information to the teachers so they too could improve their teaching approach.

### **3.6.4 Low Levels of Proficiency**

Rupp (2009) also explains that schools in the Middle East are staffed by under-qualified teachers using dated materials for instruction and finds that students continue to memorise these materials and then regurgitate them for exams; there is little independent thinking involved. Consequently, he states that students coming out of these schools do not meet the admission standards for American universities which are setting up in partnership programmes as the high school system is not good enough. Additionally, the student level of English is very low and creates more problems when students intend studying English language, as Rabab'ah (nd) reports that English language departments in most Arab universities accept high school graduates without any consideration for their level of proficiency, or whether they will be able to manage an English studies programme. As this

study will show, this is a particular issue with the students entering higher education in Libya.

### **3.6.5 Non-Native Speakers of English**

Approaches which address the limited use of English in the classroom are especially important when working with teachers who are non-native speakers of English, as they often do not have the confidence to use the spoken language demanded by communicative language teaching. As Libya is just beginning to open its doors to foreign workers, this is one of the issues which will need to be tackled. The nineteen-year ban on teaching English in Libya was only lifted in 2005 (Evans, 2009) and consequently there is not a long and consistent tradition of English language learning as might be found in other Arab states. More could be made of the non-native English-speaking teachers using their own language as well as English in the classroom. This has been advocated by Widdowson (2003), who suggests that monolingual pedagogy is not always the best solution for teaching a foreign language: in fact, he argues that monolingual pedagogy may be based on commercial rather than educational interests. Exporting English language has been a source of revenue for the English speaking countries since English became an international language, but bi-lingual teachers can build up a better rapport with learners. Elhensheri (2004) finds that in-service training and professional support are lacking in Libya and offers the solution that mentoring should be considered for inexperienced teachers, and that English language teachers should be encouraged to attend relevant conferences and make visits to English speaking countries to update their skills. This would then benefit the non-native English speaking teachers.

The issue of non-native English speaking teachers has often been a highly contentious topic and the study carried out by Al-Omrani (2008) highlights the perceptions and attitudes of one hundred male Saudi university students on this. The areas in which native speakers scored more highly were in teaching oral skills; it was found that students were forced to speak English and therefore had more opportunity to practise the language (Al-Omrani, 2008), thus building up their fluency. Another important aspect was that they were also able to observe body language and note the signs and gestures native speakers make when speaking (Al-Omrani, 2008). These areas are particularly important when the students have limited access to native English speakers, and due to its isolation and political expediency,

Libya has not been able to take full advantage of having a full complement of native English speakers available to teach in Higher Education.

However, there are also areas where non-native English speaking teachers fare well in this study. Al-Omrani (2008) finds that they are superior to native speakers in teaching reading skills due to their own experiences of learning English. They in fact find effective strategies which they pass on to their students. Non-native speakers can also make it easier for students to understand grammar and vocabulary, but native speakers do make it more relevant and can expand vocabulary by the use of synonyms when explaining words (Al-Omrani, 2008).

The excessive use of Arabic in English classes prevents opportunities for Arab students to practise their English, even although the students themselves find more empathy from non-native speakers (A-Omrani, 2008), and can relate more to them. However, the Saudi students had negative perceptions of non-native teachers who were not Arab and who did not share their language and culture: they saw them as being of little help as they felt they lacked knowledge about the mother and target culture; they could not help with pronunciation or communication; and they were unaware of the problems and difficulties encountered by Saudi learners of English (Al-Omrani, 2008).

Al-Omrani (2008) also suggests that teachers who can show evidence of their professionalism will be better respected; this is in terms of qualifications and experience. The Saudi students were prepared to look more favourably on non-native speakers if they were well-qualified (Al-Omrani, 2008). However, in Oman a study finds that both students and teachers thought bilingual teaching was essential for beginners but that English only should be used as the students advanced their learning (Al-Jadidi, 2009).

Kubota (1998) raises the concern that the dominance of English teaching in Japan influences the Japanese language and learners' perceptions of their own world, especially when the teachers are native speakers of English; it can also create cultural stereotypes. Kachru (1997) suggests that English learners should be made more aware of the multiple identities of English and that English curriculum should include a much wider variety of spoken and written English, not just depending on native speakers from the main English speaking countries. This could be an important factor when working with teachers who are non-

native speakers and could also have an impact on the negative attitudes of second language learners. Hayes (2009) argues that the non-native English-speaking teachers are more likely to be more professional in their approach as they are the ones who live in their own local community, whereas native speakers are the ones who are highly mobile and do not stay in one location for long. There are therefore social responsibilities to be considered.

### **3.7 Learning Languages**

#### **3.7.1 Interest in English**

The demand for university places across the Arab states and the high unemployment rates are also having an impact on the courses being chosen. Alarabiya (2013) reports the level of youth unemployment within the Arab region is the highest in the world. Those with higher educational attainment are disproportionately affected (Chaaban, 2010), and this may account for the popularity of English courses. At a recent conference held in Saudi Arabia, it was stated that “many students want to upgrade their educational level and future prospects by learning English”(Saudi Gazette, 2013). This can be seen in Figure 9 where young people across the Arab region were asked which skills they considered most important for getting a job. At the top of the list, above their own Arabic language, came English. Business leaders value language skills, particularly English, and they believe that

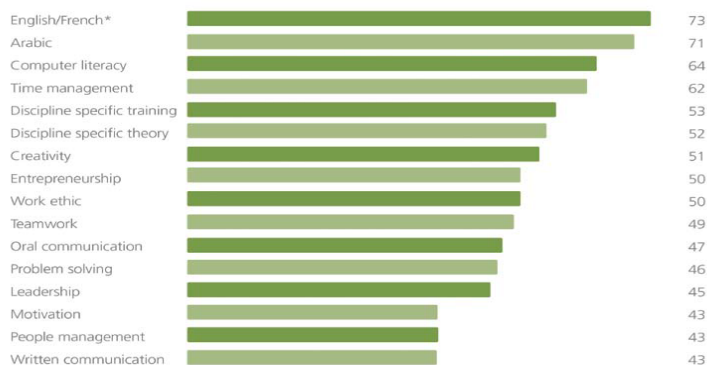
“graduates need to be proficient in English in order to succeed in the workplace. However, many are far from proficient because English language teaching is inadequate in the majority of educational programmes.” (IFC, 2011)

Carrier (2005: 1) also points out the growing number of students wanting to study the English language and the concerns of the teachers on how they can help these English language learners, especially in the continued use of traditional teaching methods. Teachers of English have been trained to use traditional methods and it is what they and their students are accustomed to (Al-Khwaiter 2001); there are social factors relevant to an understanding of the maintenance of traditional cultures of teaching, such as copying, memorising and writing up in an exam. However, as Al-Khwaiter (2001) points out, even when there have been concerted attempts to introduce communicative language teaching into Arab schools, it has met with little success. Al-Khwaiter (2001) suggests that there are

ways in which existing teaching methodology can be gradually adapted to suit the requirements of the Arab world. As with all kinds of transition, it is sometimes better to take a gradual approach than try and make sudden changes, which can be seen as criticism of tradition and are more likely to meet with resistance.

**EXHIBIT 7** YOUTH SURVEY QUESTION – WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SKILLS ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR SECURING A JOB?

Percentage of youth who feel the skill important



\* French in Morocco only  
SOURCE: eke Youth Survey (n=1,500), 2010

**Figure 9 - Skills important for employment** Source IFC, 2011

### 3.7.2 Teaching Approaches

With foreign language teaching the quality of instruction is the most important factor for successful learning (Al Moghani, 2003). The teaching approaches in the classroom can have a significant impact on motivation and this is an area which needs to be further explored within the Libyan context. This is of particular importance given the limited opportunities Libyan students have for interacting with native speakers.

Until quite recently, the preferred method of language teaching was the “grammar-translation” method, where the main goal was to read literature (Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2009). Technology was then introduced in the form of language labs, where students were encouraged through drilling and repetition; this was an audio-lingual approach (Lo Bianco et al, 2009). From the 1970s, “second language acquisition” (SLA) emerged (Hatch, 1978) and this then developed into “communicative language teaching” (CLT) where communication and interaction between participants (Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Hinkel and Fotos, 2002) are primary objectives. This is now the dominant second language approach throughout the world.

There is a new methodology of “content and language integrated learning” (CLIL) which originated in Europe (Coyle, 2008). Learners are taught school subjects directly in the target language. This is similar to immersion (Fortune and Tedick, 2008) and builds on the concept that learners focus on the language simply for the purpose of understanding subject content. Structure will therefore follow on from communication and fluency, as immersion education seeks to replicate real-life communication (Lo Bianco et al, 2009). It has been shown to produce very good results in language performance. However, it is unlikely that this will be used in Libyan schools, where the teachers have not been exposed to English language to an extent where they would have the confidence for this. It would be interesting to find out if this is a possibility for the future, given that many of the incoming teachers may have had exposure to English environments through the Libyan scholarship programme.

### **3.7.3 Teaching Methodologies**

Being aware of developments in teaching methodologies and keeping updated with these is essential for modern, quality programmes which meet the requirements of the learners. Al-Wreikat & Bin Abdullah (2010) argue that the EFL teacher training courses in Jordan do not focus on teaching techniques and there is no guidance for teachers in the textbooks on how to use effective strategies; this impacts on performance in the classroom, and on the achievement of students. Gubaily (2012) describes how in Yemen the students are taught to master structures without any understanding of how these can be applied to real life; they are based on traditional methods such as choral drills and dialogue memorisation. There is little opportunity for using English outside the classroom (Gubaily, 2012; Rabab’ah, 2005). The language is taught in a theoretical environment; nor is there any practical usage of the English language taking place in the classroom (Gubaily, 2012); pronunciation is taught independently of speaking and listening, and grammar is not integrated into reading and writing.

Fareh (2010) points out that the majority of EFL teachers in Arab schools have no teaching qualifications, and this is one of the main reasons why they continue to use the “grammar-translation” method; much of the English language class is conducted in Arabic, and the teacher prefers to do most of the talking in the classroom as this limitation on student interaction maintains discipline.



In Oman there is a well-established teacher training system for English language teachers, but trainees interviewed complained of not understanding how to apply the theory from their courses into teaching practice in real contexts (Al-Mahrooqi, 2011); however, the most important and useful part of their training programme was still regarded as being the methodology course, which trainees felt best prepared them for their teaching practice. Despite the teacher training programmes, Al-Jadidi (2009) finds that many teachers are not well trained in current methods and pedagogies. Where bilingual teachers used only English in the classroom, the students were more motivated and engaged, but where Arabic was used extensively, the lessons tended to be teacher-centred and the students had a more negative attitude towards learning English (Al-Jadidi, 2009).

#### **3.7.4 Teaching Strategies**

The teaching approaches preferred by the Omani students in Al-Jadidi's (2009) study showed that they appreciated styles which involved them personally, which allowed them to interact with others, and especially techniques such as pair work, group work and presentations. The teacher-centred lessons do not offer the same opportunities for such involvement as the learner-centred lessons. Over the past few decades there has been a shift from teacher-centred to student-centred learning and teaching (Riazi, 2007) and consequently there has been more focus on learner strategies (Rubin, 1975; Bialystok, 1981; Tarone, 1983; Sutter, 1989). The different strategies include memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social categories (Oxford, 1990), all designed to give learners ways in which they can approach language learning. A recent study by Jabali (2012) finds that memory strategies were the least preferred by Jordanian students and indicates that there has been a change from traditional rote learning. The study shows that the metacognitive strategy is the most favoured strategy and is in line with other studies from around the world (Al-Shabou, Asassfeh and Al-shboul, 2010; Shawer, 2009; Zare, 2010). This is an area which has been under-researched in Libya, where there may still be teacher-centred learning carried out in the classrooms.

It is accepted that a variety of teaching strategies are best used in the classroom as this creates interest. Students have different learning preferences and a variety of teaching styles enables them to engage. Additionally, some strategies are better suited to the lesson content or to teaching certain skills. It has also been shown that English language learners

benefit from explicit, systematic instruction (Mathes et al, 2007). Games, music, drama and storybooks are all strategies that can be used in the language learning classroom (Abril, 2003; Church, 2001; Reig & Paquette, 2009; Royka, 2002; Sun, 2003;) and will give English language learners a better chance at proficiency (Tissington and LaCour, 2010).

This may also help with motivation as the students perceive that more thought has gone into the planning of their lessons. Al Moghani's (2003) study finds that students place high value on teacher dedication and preparation and he suggests that these are effective motivating items as they encourage students to become engaged in learning. However, Al-dabbus (2008) reports that there may be a challenge in implementing some activities within Libyan secondary schools due to cultural sensitivities related to contact between male and female students.

### **3.7.5 Motivation to Learn**

Learning a foreign language requires dedication and discipline, and motivation plays a significant part in determining success in acquiring this skill. There are added complexities when factoring in cultural differences and the challenges of grammar, a different alphabet and diverse phonology, but motivation to learn can help to overcome such challenges. Motivation is a theoretical construct used to describe goal-directed behaviour (Brophy, 2004). The concept of student motivation is related to the amount of interest and effort learners are prepared to invest in their learning and their willingness to engage in learning activities (Brophy, 2004). Although there are many motivation theories, Maslow's (1943) "Hierarchy of Needs" is arguably the most influential model. This suggests that there is a hierarchy of needs which must be satisfied before higher needs can be recognised and thus motivate behaviour. Physiological and safety needs must be met before people can respond to relationships, and then they can gain in confidence through self-esteem before seeking to satisfy their self-actualisation needs. The implication for education is that learners need to be content and secure both in their personal as well as learning environment before they can direct their attention to their learning.

Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed a model of understanding motivation using extrinsic and intrinsic influences. Intrinsic motivation is evidenced by learners engaging in activities "for their own sake and without coercion such as satisfaction, a sense of competence, interest, learning and challenge" (Alderman, 2008: 252). In a language learning environment such

learners want to know more about the target language (Yeung, 2009). The extrinsically motivated learner is engaged in activities because of the promise of a reward, such as praise or certificates, or because of pressures from others (Alderman, 2008).

The construct of Gardner and Lambert's Socio-Educational Model of Language Learning (Gardner, 1985, 1988, 2000; Gardner & Tremblay, 1994) classifies two kinds of motivation. Integrative motivation when learning a foreign language refers to a learner's desire to 'know more of the cultures and values of the foreign language group....to make contact with speakers of the language...to live in the country concerned' (Wilkins: 1972:184). In other words, there needs to be an interest in becoming involved with English or American culture and people. Youssef (2012) suggests low motivation for English language learning in Libyan schools may be impacted by a negative attitude towards the target language. This may relate to political factors caused by Libya's isolation from the global community as well as more recent issues such as tensions and distrust towards foreign intervention during the civil war. Youssef (2012) determines that a major de-motivating factor is the relations of a Muslim country such as Libya and the West, which ensures that Libya has the lowest motivation in adopting anything connected to western origin. This supports Gardner's (1991) theory that there is a social level which reflects the importance, relevance and expected results of learning a second language.

The second classification is that of instrumental motivation, where a learner has a goal for learning a language. This goal may be for career progression or for further studies (Gonzales, 2010) and it is a growing area of research, especially in terms of the teaching of English, given its importance in the global world of today. Altan (2012) argues that it is now necessary to have some knowledge of English to be able to succeed in life as it brings higher social status and extended job opportunities. Learner beliefs are fundamental to motivation (Cohen and Dornyei, 2002) and Daif-Allah's (2012) study of students in a Saudi Arabian context finds that almost all are instrumentally motivated to learn English, as they recognised its importance and relevance to them. It will therefore be a challenge to understand the motivations of Libyan students and whether they have similar beliefs and expectations, given Youssef's (2012) findings.

However, Harden (2006) argues that there are a number of other factors involved, including the reading materials, the economic and linguistic environment, as well as teaching methods. Inozu (2011) adds learner and teacher beliefs as having the potential to influence behaviour and motivation to learn, and this has been emphasised in literature (Atkin, 1996; Breen, 2001; Hayashi, 2009; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Oxford, 1992; Peacock, 2001, Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). Inozu's (2011) study on trainee teachers shows that existing beliefs are well-entrenched and it is difficult to amend these. The implication is that teachers will continue a cycle of teaching whereby they use the same methods to teach as they received as learners. This may not be relevant in a modern society which has changing expectations, especially with regard to the use of technology. Inozu (2011) suggests that more research needs to be done in this area.

This should be a time when the motivation for learning English is at a peak given the high status of English internationally and the opportunities it opens for international work (Ozek, 2000; Norris-Holt, 2001), although Gardner (1982) finds that one of the prime motivators for learning a foreign language depends on how much the learner wants to become proficient in it. A combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors is most likely to contribute to motivation. However, the very success of English as an international language can also bring its own issues and one of these is the attitudes of language learners. Many young people feel that they are being pushed into learning English and teachers must therefore contend with a lack of motivation (Abu-Melhim, 2009). However Al-Khwaiter (2001) suggests that the approach to language learning may not be inclusive enough, and that teachers should be more aware of the needs of their learners. The Oxford Business Group (2008) looks at this from a slightly different perspective and states that there is no official body responsible for assessing future skills requirements for the job market. In other words, the learners are unable to see clearly the relevance of what they are learning.

### **3.7.6 Interacting with Teacher**

Libyan culture expects children not to participate in adult discussions (Orafi, 2008) and this brings its own difficulties in motivating young people in learning a language, where the purpose is to be able to communicate. There is no tradition of interaction within a classroom, which is fundamental to communicative methods of language learning, and would help to make learners aware of the reason for learning English. Textbooks are still

seen as an important source of knowledge which should be memorised and therefore learning becomes an individual endeavour (Orafi, 2008) rather than a collective and supportive effort. It is also important that there is mutual respect and a good rapport between teachers and learners (Cornelius-White, 2007; Dornyei, 2001). This is an area which should also be explored in a Libyan context, where traditions dictate that the teacher is placed in an authoritarian position (Rogers, 1983) and where teachers may still need to be persuaded of the benefits of establishing humanistic and democratic relationships with their students (Cornelius-White, 2007; Rogers, 1969, Shihiba, 2011). However, in the language learning classroom the teacher has a more important role in building good relationships with students so that they gain in confidence and they are not afraid to make mistakes (Richards & Farrell, 2011).

### **3.8 Supporting Teachers**

It is therefore important that teachers are supported so that they are able to provide the language classes which meet the needs of the students. Teacher training establishments need to be able to produce the teachers who can deliver the level of English teaching required for any country to be competitive in the modern world. Carrier (2005) finds that one of the main problems with teaching English is that there is not enough time spent on training the teachers in this specialist area, that teacher training is generic and does not take into account the specific needs for teaching English language to foreign language learners.

#### **3.8.1 Accessing Teacher Training**

Because of the demand for good teacher training, Hall & Knox (2009) argue that distance education may offer a solution and this fits into the way language itself is increasingly being used in different environments due to the technology now available. People use the internet and Skype to communicate across borders, and mobile phones have their own text language. Zhang (2008) advocates computer assisted language learning as a way of including all learners, especially those who have more introvert personalities and do not have the same level of confidence as those who are more extrovert. There is now more emphasis being placed on involving all learners in the classroom and methodology is being constantly updated, especially with technological advances but Bach et al (2007) feel that online learning will never replace the need for human interaction in a face-to-face situation; however, it is a valid method for those with a preference for self-directed learning and can

be regarded as constructivist in its approach. This links with the need for teachers to be more reflective and supports Elhensheri's (2004) findings. The teacher training issues do not affect just the Higher Education sector, but are also very evident at primary and preparatory school level, where children start learning English at the age of eleven (Aldabbus, 2008).

A more structured teacher training programme, focusing on methodology, and a quality assurance system which monitors teachers' progress, would help to allay some of the concerns, but possibly one of the areas which could most benefit from investment is that of modern technology. Libya has always been an advocate of access to education (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010), yet its technological infrastructure still falls behind that of neighbouring countries. With a good communications system, more could be done to provide cost-effective and accessible training to the teachers through professional development programmes online. The Oxford Business Group (2008) praises the effective syllabi and courses in Libya, but criticise the lack of investment in teachers, who have no motivation and direction. An online training programme could be effective in giving that direction. Hamdy (2007) highlights the apathy of teachers in wanting to develop their skills being due to low salaries, and feels this is a great challenge to the country's need to modernise educational approaches ready to meet the demands of growing student numbers. As Horton (2013) argues, if the teachers could feel part of a programme where they perceived their skills to be valued and current, then that could benefit them, their students and their organisation; continuing professional development and collaborative working have an impact on teacher performance.

The overwhelming conclusion of all the studies relating to teacher educators seems to be that they require more support from their organisations, whether that be in training opportunities to better understand the complexities and possibilities for classroom management, curriculum, pedagogy, and modern methodology or in policies, procedures and strategies which support these areas of concern. Training teachers in classroom management is fundamental to student success yet the study carried out in Kuwait by Al Hamdan (2007) finds that the teacher educators themselves are not setting a good example, nor implementing classroom rules for behaviour. Overall there seems to be a lack of professionalism, and Murphy (2007) confirms the need for a professional code of conduct

for teacher educators, who can then act as a model for their own students; it is the responsibility of the educators to show students how to interact professionally.

### **3.8.2 Quality Assurance**

Quality assurance is an issue in Arab countries and ongoing assessment is regarded as being one of the key reforms required (Rugh, 2002). Other developing countries have used strategies such as allowing branches of foreign universities to set up and deliver internationally recognised qualifications (Sivalingham, 2007), and this is a further challenge for Libya, although there are signs that partnerships are being formed, such as that between Sebha University and Heriot-Watt in Edinburgh (Evans, 2009). Al-Khwaiter (2001) feels that better co-ordination between the University training the teachers and the Ministry of Education employing them would improve practice, and this could be followed up by regular support visits from inspectors as well as better in-service teacher training programmes. While it may be helpful to have guidance from Western educational establishments, each country has its own culture and foreign universities can only provide a small part of the solution.

With the focus being on the quality of teaching and learning in universities, a two-year project carried out in Hong Kong was able to show that a marked improvement can be made by encouraging active student engagement (Kember, 2009): this has meant that all new university teachers in Hong Kong have had to undergo compulsory teacher training which ensures they know how to use student-centred forms of teaching and learning. A meta-analysis carried out by Cornelius-White (2007) finds that learner-centred teaching results in positive student outcomes and success. He suggests that this may be a two-way process, in that better teacher behaviour leads to student success, yet student co-operation and success are likely to lead to better teacher behaviour (Cornelius-White, 2007). It is a relationship where teacher and student are working together to achieve outcomes. On the part of the teacher this means positive relationships where there is empathy, warmth and the encouragement of thinking and learning. Students will then be more likely to participate, be satisfied with their teaching environment, stay on programmes, and generally be more motivated. Yorke's (2003) study shows that the promotion of self-regulation through formative feedback does achieve a high success rate for learners,

although much depends on the quality of the feedback given. This is an area which is still not fully recognised in Libyan Higher Education establishments.

Libya's five-year plan was anticipated to improve the teaching quality of the universities (Evans, 2009) and consequently enable the country to be more competitive in the international community. Due to the political conflict, this five-year plan has come to a sudden halt, although there is no indication that there will not continue to be investment in improving the quality of the education sector. Although Libya is investing heavily in educational facilities for higher education, the quality of the teaching may nevertheless be an area for investigation, especially in the way teachers are selected and supported. As Abdallah & Albadri (2011) identify, countries across the Arab region share important similarities in trying to deal with issues of quality provision: the language, the culture, traditional values of education systems, low internet connectivity, plus a shortage of computers, of educational resources and of skilled teachers.

The expansion of tertiary education is seen as a way of maximizing a country's economic output and more investment in higher education is essential for reducing poverty and reducing knowledge gaps, especially in the African countries (Bloom et al, 2006). As mentioned earlier, demand for access to higher education in the Arab states has grown very rapidly, but there are doubts about the quality of that education (Rugh, 2002): these relate mainly to under-qualified and poorly trained staff, inadequate curriculum, large class sizes and poor academic output (Sahraoui, 2008; Congress, 2007; Herrera & Torres, 2006).

### **3.9 The Curriculum**

Another major issue is related to the educational system. Although there are differences among Arab countries in their educational systems, just as there are differences in their political system, economic circumstances, and social customs, some common characteristics can be identified. They include a significant growth in literacy for females as well as males; governmental control and financing of most education, with a new trend towards some privatisation; and the emergence of some Western-style education institutions (Rugh, 2002). There is also the element of change: the Libyan education system, in line with other developing countries, has undergone significant changes on more than one occasion due to



both political and development reasons. Now the country has to face up to the challenges of providing graduates with skills to deal with globalisation (Rugh, 2002).

### **3.9.1 Adapting to Change**

It is often found in Arab countries that political changes also influence the curriculum and this can lead to confusion. Bloom et al (2006) find that African universities have not made much effort to adapt their curriculum to suit a changing world, especially in scientific advances, and to make the most of economic opportunities. There is also an attitude where new teachers make no attempt to deviate from the teaching curriculum they are given, and Elhensheri's (2004) finding is that the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language teachers towards their education programme must be addressed, that there is no room for creativity and individual thought, as teachers have not been encouraged to reflect on their pedagogical competencies. She explains that the lecture method is dominant in Libya, and this is because new teachers copy the way they themselves were taught. This is endemic in teacher training institutions as the education faculties make decisions about what is to be taught, but spend little time actually teaching themselves, and consequently they are divorced from the reality of classroom challenges (Ketter & Stoffel, 2008).

Al-Rashdan (2009) argues that the educational curriculum is mostly theoretical and philosophical across the Arab world and so Higher Education institutes are out of touch with reality; there is a tendency for a mismatch between what the students are learning and what their society needs. Education budgets are limited but Al-Rashdan (2009) suggests that Arab wealth is often being spent on educating students abroad when it could instead be used to improve its own universities, which are often impeded by a lack of funding.

In Libya the curriculum has been standardised by the Ministry of Education and it has not been possible to amend to suit local needs. Technology has been tested in a study by Rhema (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010), who finds that Libyan university students are aware of the limitations of the educational system and are open to ideas for improving communication, flexibility and learning resources through e-learning, but the issues lie with the training of the teachers to support this. However, Egypt and Tunisia have both invested in technology and are making advances in using web-based platforms for learning options (Rhema & Miliszewska, 2010).

### **3.9.2 Political Influences**

The way in which education has been allocated to regional committees in Libya has not been beneficial to continuity and standardisation across the country. Oxford Business Group (2008) find that a central authority is essential to the success of educational reform in other countries and that Libya needs a body to regulate academic progress and accreditation. The actual delivery of English in the classroom was not helped in Libya by the way in which English was taken off the curriculum for a number of years, and then abruptly reintroduced in the mid- 1990s; by this time many of the former English teachers had found other careers and there was a chronic shortage of English teachers (Orafi, 2008). Moreover, students who had not studied English at school were suddenly expected to be able to use the language at university level (Orafi, 2008) without the years of familiarisation with the language which would have helped their understanding.

Herrera (2007) criticises the way administrations have interfered in academic life and she mentions the way students are directed towards specific faculties, no matter what their own choice of study may be; the research they are allowed to carry out is restricted; the topics of conferences they attend are monitored; the curricular materials they use are limited; even their conduct is under surveillance. This does not allow the academic freedom that is taken for granted in other parts of the world.

In addition, teacher educators themselves need more support from their organisations as there are normally two routes to taking up such roles: one is from postgraduate research, in which case the educator has no practical experience; the other is from being a classroom teacher, where the educator has the experience but not the theories nor understanding of new pedagogies (Wood & Borg, 2010). Consequently it may sometimes be easier to stay with existing policies and procedures than to step outside the comfort zone by introducing new concepts which may not be in line with an organisational or political agenda. Bin Tareef's (2009) study on Jordanian Higher Education concludes that there must be a process for monitoring the quality of the teaching staff in universities, as once the system allows an individual to take up a teaching post, then that individual's performance is never assessed; this may change once the state loosens its hold on the higher education sector and more universities come under the control of the private sector. This political change from state to

private sector may improve standards of teaching as well as university facilities, and may be seen as a force for progress.

McKay (2003) suggests that topics dealing with local culture should always be included in the curriculum. She also argues that each country in which English is being taught should take ownership of the language and should therefore select their own content and methods suited to the local area: in fact she finds that communicative language teaching is not appropriate in a Chilean context and consequently is not effective. The study by Amnina et al (2007) reinforces this within a Libyan context and it is a view also taken by Sifakis et al (2003) who argues that the native speaker should not be regarded as the rightful owner of English and that learners need to be motivated to use English in an international context: the cultural elements involved in an English learner travelling to a non-English-speaking country and using the language will differ from a visit to an English speaking country. The content of the curriculum as well as the methodology for teaching English needs to be put into a local context. This was one of the findings in a study by Abu-Rabia (1999) of Israeli-Arab children which argues that the Hebrew curriculum for Arab children should be based on materials drawn from Arab culture in order to allay negative attitudes to the language. It is important for learners to be familiar with the cultural context of the language, especially when there is any social conflict, and to be aware of the wider benefits of learning the language. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges in localising curriculum and making it relevant is that there is a lack of expertise, and yet employing educational consultants from another country means introducing alien ideas (Biggs, 1995). There is therefore a conflict between relevancy and practical application.

A study by Young et al (2009) suggests that more attention should be paid to the way English culture is addressed in the classroom, especially with reference to more experienced teachers' beliefs and practices. This would require more research into textbooks and other materials being used for teaching purposes, as well as approaches to teaching, and any differences in the teaching of culture by native speakers and non-native speakers of the language. There is also a case made by Elhensheri (2004) for teachers in countries such as Libya to be able to make visits to English speaking countries to update their knowledge and skills: more emphasis should be put on the continuing professional development of the

teachers so that they feel comfortable and familiar with English used both in the context of an English speaking environment, and in the context of their own local environment.

### **3.10 Summary and Conclusion**

The issues and challenges involved in teaching English in Higher Education establishments in Arab countries are specific and defined, although many of them may also be found in other countries as well. Previous studies show that quality of teaching and learning is an area of concern. Dearing's (1997) report on the state of education in the United Kingdom highlighted this and recommended that learning and teaching strategies be focused on the promotion of students' learning, and that the student should be at the centre of the debate. He also recommended that institutions should develop nationally accredited teacher training programmes for their staff. The existing literature also seems to be mainly supportive of these recommendations for improvements in learning and teaching across the Middle East and North Africa. Because of the demand across the Arab world for university places, there has been great pressure to provide tertiary education and the growth has exceeded supply both in terms of facilities and teachers. This has created a vacuum in quality control and led to a culture of indifferent teaching. The ongoing training of teachers and professional development have not been addressed.

Across all of the Arab world there tends to be a political agenda and this has led to educational curricula which do not appear to meet the needs of either the student or the local economy. Education in all the Arab countries is subject to change but it is also a cultural issue where traditional methods are believed to be best. Unesco has been working with Arab states and its priority areas are on policy, curriculum development, training of teachers, facilities & equipment, and networking & connectivity (Unesco & Stratreal, 2010), as it is recognised that there is a need for support in meeting quality education criteria.

Teaching methodology has also been an issue, especially with communicative language teaching not being acceptable to learners in the Arab states. The educational systems of these countries can be influenced by political changes, and there are areas where English culture in the teaching of the language may be a barrier to learning and attitudes to learning. However, the use of non-native English-speaking teachers using local contexts in their teaching of English may provide a sustainable solution for meeting the demands of

learners needing international English. This may need a shift in perceptions and attitudes of the students.

Many of the issues which have been raised in the literature are also key areas of investigation for this study, especially when set in the Arab world, but it is in the context of Libyan Higher Education that there are gaps in the knowledge, and which this study seeks to explore. As has been shown, attempts have been made in Libya to improve some of the issues, and this investigation explores the attitudes and perceptions of both teachers and students who have been working in this environment, and to investigate the impact these improvements may have had on them. Against a background of transitional political changes, this study also considers the concerns of those involved in ensuring that the country delivers a Higher Education experience which meets the needs of its students.

The next chapter outlines the methods used in capturing the data for this study.

## **Chapter 4                      Methodology and Methods**

### **4.1      Introduction**

This chapter describes how the data for this study was collected and analysed and the reasons for choosing the instruments. It also details how the sample was selected and follows through the different stages of data collection. The main aim of this study is to examine issues in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Libyan Higher Education.

In order to achieve this aim, specific objectives were defined as areas for investigation. These involved exploring the importance of English language to Libyans, investigating the language teaching methodology currently used in Libyan universities, looking at any issues arising in the teaching and learning of English in Libyan universities, and identifying where successful English language teaching and learning was taking place. The methods for collecting data had to be carefully selected to attain these objectives and this chapter describes the methods which were chosen.

As the study relates to Libyan universities, the data had to be collected from students attending such an institution and from staff employed within Libyan Higher Education. The teaching staff involved in teaching English and the students learning English were the respondents whose views needed to be surveyed in the investigation. During the course of this study there were great political changes in the country and interviews took place during a period of instability in Libya, therefore there is a reflection of this in the ways that the fieldwork was carried out. Within this chapter there are more details of the impact of these changes on the methods and methodology used for this study.

Elhensheri (2004) argues that it has been a research tradition for Libyans to use questionnaires and others who have conducted Libyan research studies agree with her (Salama, 2002, Ghafir, 1987, Dughri, 1980); this single method of data collection has meant that much information about Libya has been of an anonymous quantitative nature. This method suited the initial data collection for this study, and it was a philosophy with which the participants were familiar. However, Elhensheri (2004) also shows that her use of additional methods of data collection has enabled a more in-depth analysis and a deeper perspective into the research phenomenon. Her approach using semi-structured and unstructured interviews, as well as questionnaires, allowed more understanding of the

issues involved in teacher training in Libya; it was therefore appropriate to include both semi-structured and unstructured interviews in the main data collection of this study. Not only was this relevant to an educational context, but it soon became clear that the participants were wanting to give their views and opinions against a background of political change.

## **4.2 The Approach**

The first step was to identify the issues prevalent in Libyan higher education and specifically related to the teaching of English. In order to do this it was important to place the Libyan perspective into context and to find out more about the wider Arab region. This required some background research of existing literature. With this in mind, it was then time to find out the issues from teachers and students in Libyan universities, and a field visit was arranged. The data collected from this visit then formed the basis of the ensuing questionnaire and interview questions, as the main issues had been identified.

The next step was to build and test out the questionnaires in a pilot survey to find out if they were going to provide the data required to answer the research questions. They also had to be checked for the correct translation as they needed to be put into Arabic. This was carried out in the UK, and the questionnaires were improved and ready to distribute.

The third step was to collect the data from questionnaires and interviews and this was carried out in Libya. This step became more complex than expected as the field trip coincided with the start of demonstrations against the Gaddafi regime. It required more than one visit as will be described later in this chapter.

The fourth step was to analyse the data and elicit more information where required in order to understand the issues. Within this stage a further field trip was arranged to a Dutch university to obtain comparative data. This was also time to gather more background information from reviewing literature.

The final step was to carry out more interviews in Libya to determine current issues under a new regime. All the data across three different periods of Libyan history were then analysed. It was necessary to carry out the study over such an extended period so that the data could be contextualised, although this was not the anticipated approach initially. Events in Libya changed the focus of the approach, as it became evident during the early

stages of data collection that the data might be biased. This would have had an impact on the relevance and currency of the study, as the initial data was gathered under a regime that no longer existed.

#### **4.2.1 Identifying the Issues**

The first field trip to Libya was made in October 2010. During this trip four main visits were carried out to gather background information. The first was made to the Inspectorate for Public Education to collect any data which might be beneficial in identifying issues in Libyan schools and universities, and to give guidance on taking the right direction for designing a questionnaire. The second visit covered four Libyan high schools to meet head teachers and English language teachers; this was to investigate issues in the high schools and decide whether to focus on general education or on Higher Education. The third visit was to three universities, where a short presentation was made to university staff and then to teaching staff. Finally, the fourth visit was to the Academy of Postgraduate Studies to meet students doing their Master's degree in English and to meet some very experienced teachers. All of this information helped later in building the questionnaire.

Following the short presentation at the main university campuses in Libya, a survey of university staff, teachers and students was carried out to identify any issues they felt had an impact on the teaching of English in Higher Education. These universities were chosen because they had large English language departments. A number of issues have, as indicated in the review of literature in the previous chapter, been identified as specific to the traditional culture of Arab countries, and there are those which are more particular to Libya itself. These include the way in which there is no teacher training for teachers of English in Higher Education, there is a low level of English due to the way the government decided to stop all English language teaching in the 1980s, and few opportunities exist for interaction with native English speakers, mainly because of the long international isolation of Libya due to political reasons. It was anticipated that the exploratory data collection would identify similar themes. Other factors which the author assumed may be identified were mainly related to a lack of resources. From his own work in a Libyan university, he had experienced a shortage of classrooms, a staff shortage, a lack of language labs, and a lack of qualified



teaching staff and these were expected to be listed as issues which presented a challenge to the effective teaching and learning of English.

Cards were prepared in Arabic and English asking for issues in English language teaching in Libyan Higher Education to be identified. This was a general question requesting participants to state what they felt was the main issue impacting on the teaching of English as a second language at university. These cards were then distributed to three different groups: the first group were students, who were asked to identify any issue related to learning English as a Foreign Language; the second group were university staff, who were asked about teaching issues; and the third group were teaching staff, who were also asked about teaching issues. The teaching staff were divided into university teachers and high school teachers who had recently graduated from university, as it was felt they would have the most up-to-date experience of having been students as well as teachers of English and that their contribution would consequently be valuable as it provided a link between the groups. All groups gave their informed consent to their participation and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The study was therefore started from a vantage point but the flexible approach of grounded theory, which is often used in mixed methods projects, provided a place to start where the researcher could remain as open as possible to what was seen and sensed in these early stages (Charmaz, 2006). As previously mentioned, this was also a method of collecting data with which the Libyan participants were familiar and therefore it was more likely that they would respond favourably to identifying issues which were evident to them in their teaching practice.

Before giving a presentation at the universities, the author introduced himself simply as a researcher doing a PhD in the UK. There was no reference to his previous position within the university; this was important as the students or staff may have been influenced by his position and perceived authority, and the responses may have been more guarded. Dell et al (2012) suggest that where the researcher may have a higher social status than the participants, there is a certain amount of bias known as “demand characteristics”. The participants may “adjust their behaviour in relation to what they perceive to be the investigator’s expectations”(Orne, 1962). The students had all been through the same schooling system and the staff were all involved in teaching within the same constraints,

and therefore they would all have had an understanding of the author's social status within the university.

Participants were encouraged to specify any issues that affected them personally in learning and teaching English in Higher Education. The objectives of the study were outlined: these were investigating the importance of English language to Libyans; why English is important to Libyans with reference to Higher Education; and the issues and challenges associated with learning English in Libyan Higher Education. However, it was left to the respondents to reflect on and evaluate their own views and to identify issues important to them without any external influence or suggestions.

From this first data collection exercise about two hundred cards were collected and photos and videos were used to show the random selection of respondents, a mixture of men and women, of varying ages and from different ethnic backgrounds. Approval from the Libyan university had previously been given to carry out these activities and, as mentioned, informed consent was also given by all the participants. These cards then all had to be analysed and the information helped to develop a questionnaire ready for the next interviews. Charmaz (2006) views this collection of data in the early stages of the project as an opportunity to make sense of what is occurring in the research environment, a chance to develop theoretical analyses. As each card was reviewed by the author, memos were recorded about the codes, comparisons and ideas and the data were then defined and interpreted as tentative categories. These memos are important to the whole approach as they are a written record of the researcher's thinking during the process (Birks & Mills, 2011) and they serve to identify areas for later analysis. This was what was happening in this process and the author was constantly going back to read these notes.

#### **4.2.2 Building the Questionnaire**

The questionnaires were built over a period of time, subjected to refinement, review and adaptation, and were finally divided into three sections. Initial questionnaires were piloted with five postgraduate Libyan and two Saudi students carrying out PhD research at Newcastle University, Leicester University and De Montfort University, as well as seven native English-speaking university staff from De Montfort University, making a total of fourteen. Piloting or pre-testing a questionnaire is important as it can identify potential problems such as whether the proposed instrument is inappropriate or too complicated

(van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). From the feedback given the sentences and the structure of the questionnaires were improved. Some of the questions were considered too vague and more appropriate words were used in order to elicit appropriate responses. The initial student questionnaire also relied too heavily on the adjective “good”: the first statement was originally: *The methods of teaching used are good*. This was then improved and changed to the final version of: *I believe the methods of teaching used are effective and beneficial to my learning* which was more focused and likely to provide a more thoughtful response.

The second statement of: *The teachers are well trained* was considered too subjective and was removed. Two other statements were also removed: *There are plenty of good reference resources in the library* and: *Teachers are well prepared for their sessions*. It was felt that students would not be able to assess the level of English as in the statement: *Learners have a good starting level of English* and that this was inappropriate. Nor would students be able to comment on: *Teachers have a plan for their teaching*, whereby they would be able to judge: *I believe the course is well organised*. It was also suggested that more statements could be added to gauge the interaction of students with teachers.

In the second section for students, where they were asked to rate the quality of specific areas identified in the initial data collection as being potential issues, there were a number of changes. *Teaching facilities* was amended to: *classroom resources* and: *Building, Rooms* and: *Furnishing of classroom* were removed as it was considered that students had no control over these and therefore they had no meaning for them, that the premises were not an appropriate area of discussion for students. *Leadership* was also considered inappropriate as there would need to be points of comparison.

The third section was intended to elicit opinions. *What do you think of the curriculum for learning English?* was thought to relate more to teachers than students and was changed to *Why are you learning English?* which would focus on the student’s needs and motivation. It was also felt that: *What do you think are the biggest issues in teaching English in Higher Education in Libya?* was too direct and could result in too wide a range of issues which might not have any relevance to the study: instead this question was changed to: *What do you find most challenging about learning English?* The final amendment for the student

questionnaire was in asking the students to identify up to three things they felt would improve the teaching of English, which was more focused than the original: *What do you think would improve the teaching of English?* This was more likely to elicit a response as the students were then encouraged to consider particular factors.

The teacher questionnaire also underwent a process of improvement. *I have been well trained* was amended to: *I have had sufficient training to carry out my job satisfactorily*. *Teaching resources* replaced *reference resources* in the second statement. There was once again a recommendation to use words other than *good* and *adequate* was used in statement six: *I find my students have an adequate starting level of English*. Instead of asking: *I always motivate my students*, it was changed around to: *My students have high levels of motivation*. The size of classes had been identified as an issue but: *My classes are a good size* was improved to: *A large class affects my teaching*. Some of the statements needed a slight change of emphasis as in: *I have been observed by colleagues* being amended to: *Observations by colleagues are carried out*. It was also felt that the word *good* was being over-used and therefore it was dropped from: *My students make good progress in my classes*.

In the second section of the teacher questionnaire there was only one deletion and that was the removal of: *English lab*. The third section was tightened with: *Why do you think English is important for Libya* amended to: *Why do you think English language is important for Libyan students?* *How well do you think your students were prepared in English language at secondary school* was considered better as: *How well do you think your students were prepared in English language before they started their degree studies?* And: *Any further comments* was added to the end.

It was anticipated that this piloting process would both improve the quality of results and provide responses which could be interpreted correctly as the misinterpretation of questionnaire items can have an impact on the validity of any research (Bowden et al, 2002). There are a number of criteria which can be used for judging appropriateness of survey questions; these include the non-usage of negative questions, that the question makes sense to everyone, the meaning and interpretation of the question is clear, and that the question is simple and grammatically correct, all focusing on the style of language,

meaning, clarity and consistency of interpretations (Bowden et al, 2002). In using fourteen participants to pilot the questionnaire, it was felt that a wide range of opinions would be covered and that their professional experience would also benefit the relevance, validity and reliability of the survey. Feedback from the participants was received through discussion and written comments both via email and in face-to-face meetings.

There were two separate questionnaires: one for students and one for teachers (see appendix 1). The first section for the students was designed to identify general issues through a series of twenty two statements with which the students had to determine their extent of agreement or disagreement. These issues had all been highlighted in the initial data collection from the cards received by respondents and it was now important to determine the extent of consensus as to whether these were valid issues.

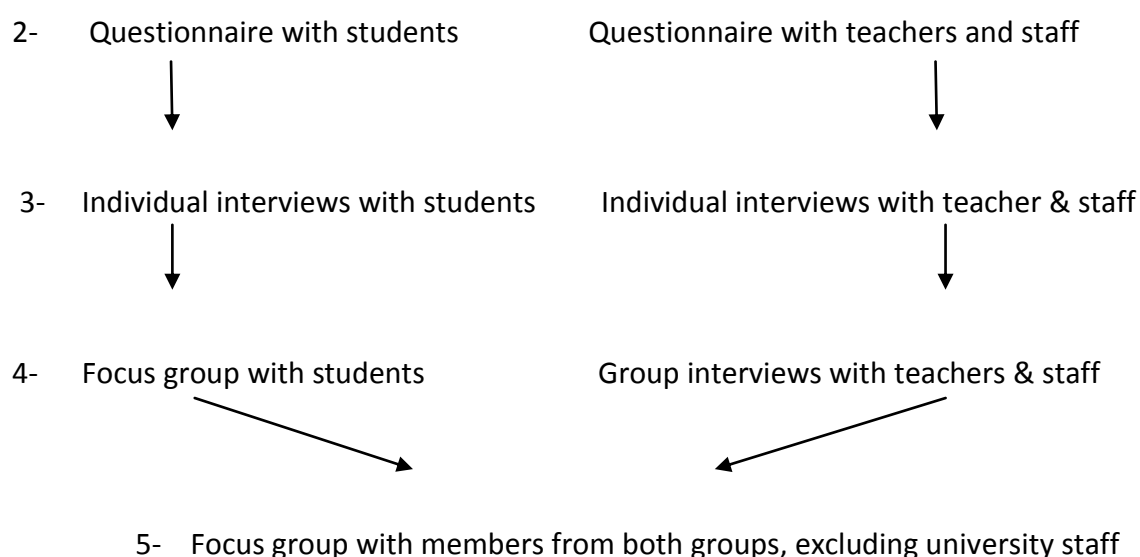
#### **4.2.3 Collecting the Data**

In order to obtain as many views as possible and identify the significance of English within a Libyan context, the author had researched as many universities as he could find on the internet to locate the ones where English was taught as a major subject. It was important to find academic organisations which had an English language department as this would guide him to locations where the teaching and learning of English was of interest. He also used his contacts within two major universities and the Academy of Postgraduate Studies in Tripoli. In addition to the teaching staff and the students, it was clear that the management within the universities were in a better position to comment on the importance of English language to Libyans, and it was decided to include all three groups within the study.

The original data collection schedule (figure 10) was in five stages and the expectation was that there would be an initial period of data collection; this would then be followed by distribution of questionnaires, then individual interviews, and finally a series of focus groups with the different groups.

1- Informal orientation with students, teachers and officers





**Figure 10** Original data collection schedule

As will be described later in this chapter, the collection of data did not follow this schedule. Due to the political situation at the time, there was not the opportunity to carry out the fourth stage of a focus group with students and group interviews with teachers and officers in March 2011. The students and staff of the university were staying only the minimum amount of time at the university because of security issues. However, the informal orientation, the questionnaires, and a limited number of interviews were carried out according to this schedule.

### **i. Questionnaires**

The second stage of data collection took place in February and March 2011 and was completed in April 2011. This involved the questionnaires which had been developed from the issues identified in the initial data collection. In co-ordination with the data collection team (four teaching assistants from one Faculty of Education) over a period of more than two months, a plan for collecting the data was organised. The meeting was arranged for 16<sup>th</sup> February 2011 which, with hindsight, was an auspicious date as it marked the timing of the first demonstrations against the Gaddafi regime. On this date a presentation was given at the university by the author, which expanded and explained the project in detail. The presentation covered an introduction to the research topic, the project objectives, the methodology for data collection and the anticipated contribution to knowledge.

A visit to the Faculty of Education in one city was made the next day, where a presentation was delivered to a random selection of students, teaching staff and the Head of

Department. It was originally thought that higher graded students would be more interested, active and motivated in the project, but a random mix of students attended the presentation and agreed to participate and be interviewed. These included everybody with an interest in learning and teaching English in the Libyan education system. There were undergraduate students from two universities as well as education inspectors, secondary school English language teachers, Libyan and foreign English language lecturers, university management, the Head of the English Language Department, and the Dean of the Faculty of Education. Also present at this meeting were members of the data collection team so that they could understand what would be required of them in future presentations which they might be asked to carry out.

Both the Department of Education and the English Language Department were involved in the meeting and the discussion following on from the presentation, which was carried out in both English and Arabic and took about twenty five minutes. Teaching staff were told about the questionnaire surveys and agreed a timetable to allow these to be carried out, and they arranged the most convenient time to hand out the questionnaire and also to do the interviews. On the same day two teaching staff interviews were done, and the questionnaires were handed out to students, teaching staff and university staff. The author was in the classroom at the time of filling out the initial questionnaires so the students could ask any questions and get an immediate answer which helped make the progress smoother and faster. The questions related to the process of recording the information on the forms rather than the actual data requested and therefore the presence of the author in no way compromised the quality of the data received. However, it did help the data collection team who were also present, as they then had some knowledge of the potential questions they might be asked, and how to respond to these questions.

As the author had worked at the university previously, and had been in a position of authority as Head of the English Department in the Faculty of Education, he had been very close to the teaching and learning of English and was able to establish a rapport with students and university staff. Charmaz (2006) relates that such an interpretive method used in grounded theory means entering the research participants' worlds and the author had experience of this. Not only had he been at the university as teaching staff, but he had also been through the same educational system and had been a university student there.

However, the data collection team came from a different Faculty and there was no shared history between them and the participants. This allowed both kinds of data to be compared to determine if there was any bias involved and whether the impact of the interviewer on the participants would show any discrepancies in the results.

The use of a questionnaire allows a larger number of respondents to be surveyed and adds to the breadth of the study. It is also a relatively quick and cheap way of getting a substantial amount of data, which is important to add reliability to the results. Wimmer & Dominick (2011) point out that such surveys have the advantage of enabling a problem to be investigated in a realistic setting and they are not constrained by geographical boundaries. The distribution of this questionnaire was originally planned to cover a wider geographical area, with the help of the internet and the data collection team, who were prepared to travel. Circumstances prevented this but the survey was still able to be conducted with participants in a realistic setting and a sufficient number of responses across a range of university staff, teaching staff and students were gathered.

There are, however, disadvantages to using questionnaires: the wording of the questions may bias the results; the wrong respondents may complete the forms; they cannot be manipulated and there is consequently no control over variables; and the response rates can be very low (Wimmer & Dominick (2011)). As far as possible, the author had tried to minimise these risks. The questions had been very carefully designed, piloted, analysed and approved before being distributed to respondents. As the internet was not available in Libya due to the political unrest, the questionnaires were distributed in person with the help of the data collection team.

The design of the questionnaire was refined further as more data was collected, but this fits well with the grounded theory methodology as this study did not have preconceived ideas about the research questions. It meant that, in line with grounded theory, the data could be collected, they could then be examined for patterns and lead to building the theory as explained by Strauss & Corbin (1994). The method of grounded theory, as Goulding (1999: 6) so succinctly puts it, is "*theory grounded in data which have been systematically obtained through 'social' research*". This study has followed a systematic process, whereby the data have been collected and interpreted from the early stages and this has guided the way in



which the next stages of collection may need to be modified. The emergent theories have evolved as this process has developed.

## **ii. Interviews**

The third stage of data collection was through interviews. The dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee plays a role in shaping qualitative interviews (Broom et al, 2007) and it is within this context that social values and cultural practices are reinforced (Oakley, 1999). Factors such as gender, environment, professional status, and age can have a strong influence on the outcomes of an interview (Broom et al, 2007). The author was careful to ensure that a small team of interviewers was briefed properly to standardise the process. The potential interviewers were given a presentation of the project and then advised on the rationale for the questions to be asked. The importance of the study was stressed and full information was given to them so that they could understand what was required. They were told of the background to the study, why it was being carried out, and that this was the first such investigation within a Libyan context. Further, they were instructed to use the set of questions and to record the responses without showing any political bias. They were to be careful that they made no reference to anything which might be construed as critical of the government. This was important in the particular environment in which the interviews were carried out, as there were at that time demonstrations against the existing Gaddafi regime and the situation was volatile. The author then carried out sample interviews while the team was present so they could see the way in which he wanted the interviews to be carried out. Before starting on interviews, the team was fully familiar with all the questions to be asked. These were semi-structured interviews where there was a basic set of questions worded in an open-ended format and requiring open-ended responses.

Three different groups of participants were interviewed separately as focus groups; these were students, teachers and university management. This was to allow an insight into the issues as viewed from different perspectives. It was also to ensure that each group would have confidence to give their views openly without being constrained by the views of others, or feel that they were being critical of another group in their responses. The

selection of students included postgraduate students studying English as well as current students learning English from various departments. Individual interviews allow individual perspectives to be explored, and with the student interviews the focus was on learning. These are to some extent case studies, and provide a qualitative aspect to the study. Comparisons of perspectives across the different types of students and the impact the issues have on them could then be made. Individual interviews were also carried out with teachers and officers who completed the questionnaires. The focus of these interviews related more to teaching issues. These were then compared across the different groups. Resources were used in order to obtain video and audio evidence alongside the paper results, and all the respondents gave their permission for the interviews to be taped.

The group interviews enabled the issues to be explored further and consider norms which identify the influence of the environment and therefore put the issues into perspective (Stromer-Galley & Mantey, 2009). This is important as the issues were relating to a specific region, namely Libya, and it is this which was giving meaning to the whole investigation. Morgan (1996) states that it is very common to use these focus group interviews alongside surveys and individual interviews, particularly when wanting a comparability of results produced from the individual and focus group interviews. The teachers and university staff were involved in group interviews. For political reasons the students did not turn up at the university as the security issues increased and they did not feel safe venturing out, and most of the foreign teaching staff left the country over the next three weeks, so consequently progress was then frozen for that period of time. The country was in turmoil, there were demonstrations and it was dangerous to be seen in public as all group meetings were banned. On the 13<sup>th</sup> March the data collection team carefully recommenced their data collection, which was then completed on the 24<sup>th</sup> April, the progress having taken longer than expected. The data collection team were a small group of university educated friends who had been well briefed on the study and who knew the area. As they were living in the country, they had a better understanding of the position of Libya and when it was safe enough to continue collecting data.

From the four individual interviews and three focus group interviews there seemed to be sufficient data to allow a valid analysis, which gave depth and understanding of the issues faced at that particular time. As Goetz & LeCompte (1984) note, interviews are useful for

exploring how and why subjects respond to events, situations and innovations, and within this study they played an integral part in linking issues encountered on a wider scale, as identified within the literature, to the very specific area of research being investigated. In using a relational methodology, all the information can be crossed from the different groups being interviewed, which Di Corpo & Vanni (2005) find is the best way of investigating any connection between two or more variables. The information from the interviews and the structured questions within those interviews could then be used to analyse whether the different groups perceived the issues in the same way. It was therefore taking a comparative approach, which was able to be tracked by the use of a table set up at the beginning of the data collection process.

### **iii. Third Field Study**

During 2011 the political situation in Libya had been evolving rapidly, and it was felt that more questions had been raised when the original data were analysed; however, it was thought that these questions might need to be part of a future investigation, as the situation in Libya had deteriorated and the author was unable to contemplate another field study with the country at war.

However, upon reflection of the data, and the continuing changes within Libya, a further field study was arranged for December 2011 in order to carry out some more interviews to gain insight into the evolving situation. This was also to further investigate areas where the views of some of the participants needed more exploration, especially where there had previously been more political control over certain issues, such as curriculum, foreign staff and international communications. By then it was possible to make an indirect trip back to Libya. Entry into the country was still not straightforward and required travelling through Tunisia. However, within Libya there had been changes experienced in the attitudes of the people and the ensuing chapters give more detail about these changes and how they have added to the investigation.

Although it was still a very unsettled environment, in cases quite dangerous, the author was able to make contact with a number of people and arrange interviews with university teaching staff, management, and also to convene a focus group. It was important to the project to be able to arrange this focus group to be able to profit from the interaction between participants and gain insight into current conditions. The focus group consisted of

just teaching staff, which Litosseliti (2007) approves, stating that homogenous groups work best in focus groups. The advantage of such a group is that participants can feel comfortable with each other and can then freely express different points of view; it is a more natural environment than individual interviews as the participants are influencing, and being influenced by, others as in real life (Litosseliti, 2007); they are useful for gaining a number of different perspectives on a given topic and examining participants' shared understanding of a situation (Litosseliti, 2007). This has all added value to this investigation as it has enabled issues to be explored which previously would not have been openly discussed due to political pressures. These interviews carried out under a rapidly changing environment have served to give authenticity to the study, as well as give insight into the risks involved in carrying out research over this period. Due to further political instability in the area, the border between Libya and Tunisia was closed and it once again became impossible to leave the country for some time.

#### **4.2.4 Comparative Data and Analysis**

The data collected from Libya was being analysed in isolation and it was decided that there needed to be a point of reference with which the data could be contextualised. Libya is a developing country and the importance of English to Libyan students needed to be put into perspective. For this reason it was decided to interview Dutch respondents at an international conference in Utrecht in June 2012. The Netherlands is an established country and the Dutch university students and teaching staff were able to give views and opinions which could then be compared and contrasted with the Libyan students and university teaching staff. This was subsequently used to give a measurement of comparison between a developing country and a developed country where English is a second language.

The author was attending the conference which was related to digital communication used by migrant groups and this seemed an opportune time and place to consider a point of reference. It is unusual to have access to university staff and students on an informal basis such as this and full advantage was taken of this. Participants were approached individually and given full details of the research study so that they could make an informed decision. All of those approached were very happy to offer their views and opinions as they could see the author had a genuine interest. It had become clear to the author during the conference that there were differences in approach in learning English at university. In the Netherlands

the students can attend university courses held completely in English, which means that the university staff must be fluent in the English language. The students themselves choose to take their degrees in English and there is a conscious choice to use the language, which was in direct contrast to Libya, where English is not yet so embedded. This is a model for the way in which Libya should be planning for the importance of English in the world today. The author wanted to find out how students and staff felt about having English language so high in priority, when the participants were Dutch-speaking. This also gave the author an opportunity to collect data as an outsider, as he had no understanding of the culture of the Netherlands. He was therefore more objective in his interviewing, as he too wanted to find out more about the experiences of the Dutch participants; he was open to new concepts, and the Netherlands was an excellent point of reference when contrasted with the situation in Libyan Higher Education.

A grounded theory approach to the methods of collecting data seemed appropriate; according to Birks & Mills (2011) grounded theory should be used for explaining relevant and significant but also new and unique knowledge. It is designed to create theories derived from real-world situations (Oktay, 2012) and, with the fluid political situation in Libya, it became more evident during the progress of the study that the grounded theory approach fitted well with the purpose of the investigation. There was an idea originally that issues might be a lack of resources and teachers, and that poor curriculum could also be highlighted, then the data were collected and analysed in order to confirm and identify the issues, and these themes were then incorporated into a questionnaire. The data continued to be analysed whilst being collected, and the results formed the basis of the later interview questions.

Charmaz (2006) also refers to the way researchers using this approach make systematic comparisons throughout the enquiry as they are constantly looking at the data and analysing, and there is constant interaction between data, codes and categories due to early analytic writing. The questions formulated in the early stages can change and develop as the analysis takes place and more specific questions can be asked to give information on the research problem. The initial data collection lent itself to grounded theory methodology as it was this collection which informed and developed the ensuing questionnaires and interviews. Grounded theory is an inductive, comparative and interactive approach to an

inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). It therefore fitted well with the objectives of this study because, although the researcher was aware of what the issues might be, there needed to be confirmation of these issues from others. Any new issues could also be identified and then incorporated into the questionnaires and the interviews.

A statistical software package (SPSS, now known as PASW) was used to run the statistical analyses and factor analysis techniques were used to explore simple issues. At the exploratory stage it was a thematic analysis to analyse the responses regarding perceptions of the issues in teaching English in Higher Education. The objective of this was to understand the phenomena from the perspective of the respondents (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). From the existing literature it was clear that there would be recurring themes, but there were no prior hypotheses or preconceptions. Seven stages of the mixed methods data analysis have been identified by Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie (2003) as being data reduction, data display, data transformation, data correlation, data consolidation, data comparison and data integration. Data reduction requires the dimensionality of the data to be reduced through factor analysis and thematic analysis, data display requires the describing of any graphical or visual data, data transformation requires qualitative data to be put into numerical codes for statistical analysis, data correlation requires both qualitative and quantitative data to be correlated, data consolidation requires all the qualitative and quantitative data to be combined to create new sets or codes, data comparison involves comparing the data from both sources, and data integration involves both sets of data being integrated into a coherent whole (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). While all these stages are set out for the process, in this particular study only some of these were used.

Quantitative data emanating from the questionnaires were analysed using normal descriptive statistics which measured the frequencies and from these it was possible to compare the different groups of students, university staff and teaching staff. The data from the open-ended questions and the interviews were put into group categories, again making it possible to compare and contrast the views and opinions of these groups.

A systematic and rigorous method is required for the process of qualitative data analysis (Scrivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Reflecting on and understanding how the research process is carried out has an impact on the outcomes of the study, therefore it is important to

highlight this. The author's understanding of Libya and the Higher Education system in Libya has had an influence on the methods chosen to carry out the data analysis and also on the way the emanating knowledge has been constructed and produced. It was because of this that the author felt he needed to be able to compare the responses from the Libyans with similar respondents from another country.

#### **4.2.5 Developing Methodology**

##### **i. Fourth Field Study**

The data collected from the Dutch respondents provided some more areas for investigation and comparison with the Libyan data. However, there was concern that events in Libya had now evolved so much that the previous findings would no longer be reliable. A fourth field trip to Libya was therefore arranged in October 2012 as the changes there continued, and it was deemed necessary to collect more views and opinions under the changing political landscape. It was felt that this would have an impact on the study and that, without such up-to-date data, the research study would not be an accurate reflection of the situation and would therefore compromise the results and recommendations. The interviews give real insight into the changing environment within Libya.

The data were in this way further validated by the interviewing which now took place in Libya, serving to give a unique perspective into changing views and opinions which were not constrained by political pressures. On this visit the author was able to enter Libya more freely, although the situation was still not completely stabilised. However, the background within which the interviews took place highlighted the changes which were occurring in Libya.

### **4.3 Evaluation**

#### **4.3.1 Ethical Issues**

Before this study began it was important to look at all the ethical issues which might be encountered. Orb, Eisenhower and Wynaden (2000: 93) conclude that:

“Ethical principles can be used to guide the research in addressing the initial and ongoing issues arising from qualitative research in order to meet the goals of the research as well as to maintain the rights of the research participants.”

In the interviews participants were required to share their experiences and therefore they had to trust the author with these experiences. This was particularly sensitive due to the

evolving political situation in Libya. However, all the participants were assured that any information they gave would be confidential, in that they would not be identified. Any data relating to them would be referenced under a pseudonym. The participants were all willing to participate and share their experiences under these conditions. Informed consent and confidentiality were anticipated as ethical issues and were consequently addressed.

The safe-keeping and storage of data was also a consideration. Although video and audio recordings were used for transcribing interviews, and for authenticating the data, their use has been limited to those purposes. All stored data is password protected on a computer and identified by code rather than name.

Collecting data through a period of crisis in Libya raised specific ethical issues mainly relating to the protection of individuals. The interviewer was aware that there could be potential danger to himself and the participants in arranging meetings for interviews which could be construed as political at a very sensitive time. On a number of occasions the arranged interviews had to be rescheduled to ensure they were conducted in a safe environment. At all times the interviewer had to take account of any risks which might be involved and make a judgement on the level of those risks. This meant that the interviews could not be conducted in public places.

As all communication networks had been cut in Libya due to the political unrest, the researcher could not carry out interviews by email or by other online or digital means. He had to be in Libya in person as it was his responsibility to collect the data; he could not ask others to do this on his behalf and make any decision on the element of risk involved. The safeguarding of participants was paramount at all times.

#### **4.3.2 Sampling**

The key purpose of sampling is that it allows researchers to make a limited number of observations, and at the same time gain an accurate picture of a much larger population (Babbie, 2010). In order to get a sample that was representative as possible, the sampling for this study was to be from a group within a university, as the investigation was specifically looking at English within Higher Education across Libya. There are clear reasons why any study carried out within a Libyan educational establishment anywhere across the country can be classified as homogenous: Libyans are all Sunni Muslims; they have all been through



the same educational system; groups from specific educational stages are all the same age; they are all of the same culture as Libya has not been open to foreign influences; all Libyans come from a similar social background; and because Libyan society is tribal, everyone is aware of his or her place within the social structure of the country. It is generally agreed that across the country the Libyan people come from a similar background: "Libya has a relatively small and homogenous population" (Democracy Digest, 2013).

The selected samples from the Higher Education students were homogenous because they came from the same city, the same culture, the same religion, the same educational background, and were of the same age. There is no big difference in the wealth of Libyan students, nor is there any variation in the class, as they are mostly from middle class backgrounds. "Libya is more homogenous in terms of ethnicity, language and religion than other societies" (Dobbins & Wehrey, 2011). Working class tends to be foreign workers in Libya, but the student participants were all Libyan nationals.

Within the Education Departments there will always be a higher proportion of female students as opposed to male, because these faculties attract more female applicants. The sample was then further stratified by years of study. According to Babbie (2010), stratified sampling decreases the probable sampling error as it is drawing from a homogenous population and a homogenous population produces samples with smaller sampling errors than a heterogenous population. Denscombe (2005) defines a stratified sample as one in which every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected and this study would produce the same results if the sample had been carried out in any of the Libyan universities. The groups selected for sampling in this study had similar characteristics and those factors were representative generally of all Libyan students.

The initial sample involved English learners and included postgraduate students. Permission first had to be gained from two universities to carry out the survey with their staff and students. The author then went to the Faculties of Education and the centre of postgraduate studies in both universities as well as to first and fourth year student classes. As mentioned previously, in order to generate the issues to be addressed, cards were distributed within these classes. It was important to use the cards which simply asked an open question about their opinion on English language learning in Higher Education, as

these formed the basis of the research design. The advantage of using such cards was that they produced defined issues and clarified the objectives of the study. These cards were then gathered and brought back to be analysed and questionnaires were consequently developed. One of the disadvantages of using the cards was that they were often difficult to read and it was time-consuming sorting them into categories, as they were all hand-written and there were about two hundred responses.

For the main data collection a selection of first and fourth year students were chosen for the questionnaires and interviews because the first years are closer to the experiences of high school education whilst the fourth years have more experience of the Higher Education system, and have had more time to form their own ideas. It was important to gauge the effect of high school English learning on the level of students entering university, and the first year students were in a position to provide this. These students were advised of the purpose of the investigation and they agreed to participate on a voluntary basis. Initially it was considered that high school teachers could also be surveyed but then it was decided that they would not be relevant as the research was focused on university teaching. The students were between 18 years old and 22 years old and most were going to become teachers of English in Libyan high schools once they had completed their first degree.

There were several Education Faculties within the university and each one of these faculties has a number of departments covering fields such as Arabic language, Biology, Maths, Chemistry, English, Computers and Physics. Although the English departments have full-time English language students, all the other departments offer part-time English classes and therefore are also included in the sample. Within the homogenous groups selected for sampling, random sampling was used for the students and for the teaching staff, both Libyan and foreign, who were English language teachers. It was random on the basis that any of the students and staff in these departments could have been selected, and they all had an equal chance of being chosen for this study. This gives a more accurate representation of the sample groups and is a very common method of data collection used in mixed methods research, obtained as it is by separating population elements into groups (Kemper et al, 2003). A stratified random approach ensures that the sample is proportional and that the numbers sampled from within each department are representative of that department, and this was the approach taken for the initial data collection and for the

questionnaires. The sample for this study was a stratified random sample on the basis that there were different categories comprising students, teaching staff, and management, which meant that they were stratified. Samples were then chosen randomly from within those categories.

However, when it came to interviews, the political situation made this more difficult. For the university management, who were mainly Heads of Department, the teaching staff, as well as the students in many cases, it became a matter of availability for sampling. Many of the foreign teaching staff left the country and for some time normal classes were suspended. The impact of the foreign staff leaving meant that there were no longer going to be opportunities for interviewing them and getting their in-depth analysis of the issues. As there had been some criticism of foreign teachers in the initial data collection, this was a wasted opportunity but the study was investigating a moment in time. Because of the political situation, this moment in time had changed the dynamics of the teachers in Higher Education. There were no longer foreign teachers in the universities, therefore the study had to move on. The moment being captured for this study was now a country without foreign teaching staff.

Once the situation in Libya made it possible to return, the author made a conscious decision to go back and carry out more individual interviews in December 2011, as well as convene a focus group meeting of five teaching staff. This was in order to ensure that the results of the study would not be compromised in any way. As earlier mentioned, events in Libya were evolving so quickly, there was concern that the data collected would not present an accurate picture of the current situation in Libya. Therefore it was decided that a further collection of data through interviewing needed to take place. This was then carried out in October 2012 to ensure the value, the validity and the reliability of this investigation. The three stages of interviews in February 2011, in December 2011 and in October 2012 were then able to give a fuller image of the situation in Libya. In February 2011 Libya was under the Gaddafi regime, in December 2011 Libya was under the Transitional Council, and in October 2012 Libya was governed by an elected National Council, therefore three different political systems have been in place during the course of these interviews. This meant that the methodology design for this study was subjected to change in order for the study to provide an accurate investigation of the issues.

The volatile and rapidly changing political situation in Libya has also had an impact on the homogeneity of the sample. Whereas the study started off with Libyan population as being very similar in background and attitudes, as they attended similar schools and came from comparable middle class families, there have been changes within the society. This has been due to political allegiances and societal changes due to the effects of war. It would therefore be beneficial if future studies could focus on the different areas of Libya as the situation in Tripoli is now unlikely to be the same as in Benghazi. This study was caught in the transitional period of political change and has given an account of the situation as it was at the time of data collection. Future studies may well find that views and attitudes differ according to the geographical area of Libya and this may well have implications for any study which seeks to represent the Libyan population. There may no longer be one homogenous Libyan society as political changes have an impact on the social backgrounds of the population of Libya, due to the civil war. The choice of participants for interviews was limited, but the author believes that they were still of a homogenous nature at the time; university teaching staff at the main universities throughout Libya were still the same people in the same jobs. As the political situation has evolved, this may have changed in more recent days, but when these interviews took place, the participants represented a homogenous sample of Libyan university teaching staff in Libyan Higher Education.

#### **4.3.3 Qualitative and Quantitative Data**

The objectives of the study were to explore and investigate issues in the teaching and learning of English in Higher Education in Libya. It was not possible to do this through a quantitative survey only as deeper issues needed to be investigated. Qualitative research is interested in the perspectives of the participants (Flick et al, 2007) and it was appropriate for this study that some sense could be made of the meanings that people bring to the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study included a number of interpretive practices identified by Denzin & Lincoln (2005), including notes, interviews, conversations and memos to self.

The quantitative data depended on the structure of the questionnaires in order to elicit relevant and meaningful responses, which would address the objectives of the study. It also required that careful consideration be given to the sample both in numbers and background, so that the respondents would be sufficient for a reliable and valid

interpretation of the results, and that they would be knowledgeable about the issues being investigated so that their responses reflected their experiences and opinions.

For the qualitative data both individual and focus group interviews were to be used. There are three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. In the initial data collection stage it is more appropriate to use the unstructured approach where the researcher engages with the participants with little predetermination of topics to be covered (Hartas, 2010); this can allow ideas to flow in and define themes to be pursued. This study was then more concerned with semi-structured interviews as the issues and themes had been identified when it came to the interview stage of data collection. Within the questionnaires there were open-ended questions which gathered similar data to a structured interview, apart from the response being written rather than oral. However, the semi-structured interviews addressed the themes which had been identified, some of the questions were improvised as appropriate to the discourse between researcher and participant, and further probing took place where relevant (Hartas, 2010).

As Denzin & Lincoln (2003) argue, there are no objective observations in qualitative research, only observations which are situated in the worlds of the interviewer and interviewee, and it is likely that the interviewees will offer narratives or stories without being able to give full explanations for them. It is within this context that the researcher must interpret or make sense of these stories and it makes the process easier if the researcher has an understanding of the environment within which the research is situated. For this study it was important that the researcher understood the background of the interviewees so that he could contextualise the data which was being collected from a number of sources, including conversations, documents and interviews as well as focus groups.

In educational research, Hartas (2010) states that there is a need to combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches as educational phenomena entail both dimensions. The quantitative approach produces statistical data and provides a clear foundation for discussion (Denscombe, 2005). However, it is the qualitative approach which interprets and makes sense of the phenomena (Cohen et al, 2007).

Data collection was from questionnaires and both focus group and individual interviews gathered over a period of two years, from October 2010 to October 2012. The data were then analysed with the quantitative data from the surveys being measured by frequencies, indicating the number of responses to each item. These were using a Likert scale whereby participants had a choice of five options as to whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The qualitative data from both the surveys and the interviews were categorised into themes, and these were then analysed according to individual responses. All of the data were used to provide more understanding of the issues identified.

#### **i. Mixed Methods**

Within the overarching grounded theory methodological approach, it was considered that a mixed method of data collection would work best, using either a concurrent design model which would help to validate and compare the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) or a sequential design model whereby more data could be collected to add to the earlier results. The concurrent would entail questionnaires and interviews to be carried out at the same time, whilst the sequential would allow interviews to take place after the questionnaires had been completed and analysed. The data collected from one method can then be compared with the data collected from the other method. The mixed method approach allows the collection of both quantitative data from the questionnaires and qualitative data from the interviews, and therefore provides a more comprehensive insight into the issues. The quantitative data provides a good overview of the size of the problems whereas the qualitative data provides a depth of understanding of the problems. Apart from enabling the researcher to gain a fuller understanding of the problems, one method helps inform the other method (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

The nature of the study and the purpose of the research lends itself to a combined methods approach. As Nudzor (2009) emphasises, there are some aspects of social life which are difficult to research using a quantitative or positivist approach, whereas a qualitative or interpretivist approach helps in discovering and generating knowledge. He cites Denzin (1970) who finds that a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods can add a depth and reliability to the data, which would be lacking if only one method were used, especially in the educational field: the methods complement each other and can provide an insight into areas that would otherwise not be known. The questionnaires identify issues,

whereas the interviews provide a more personal perception and in their interpretivist approach allow more exploration of the identified issues (Nudzor, 2009). Hesse-Biber (2010) argues that a mixed methods approach holds greater potential to address complex questions, but it may also raise questions leading to a further study, or even extend the breadth and range of the original investigation. As there have been few preceding studies on the teaching of English in Higher Education in Libya, it was hoped that a mixed methods approach would indeed promote discussion and encourage more research in this field. This study seeks to address the issues raised and to develop more awareness of these issues, but at the same time add fresh insights (Ary et al, 2010)

When using a mixed methodology, it is important to have a clear rationale for the approach, an overarching research question and a clear rationale for using each method (Woolley, 2009). This study fulfils these criteria in that the approach is very clearly defined as being an investigation into English language teaching in the specified Higher Education establishments in Libya. The reason for using quantitative surveys was to identify the impact of the issues identified, while the qualitative interviews were to identify the possible reasons for those issues.

This relationship between qualitative and quantitative data is important to this study as the questionnaire by itself served to identify areas of concern, or points of view, whilst the interviews provided an opportunity to explore these further. Each method provided a different understanding which complemented the other and helped to make sense of the data collected. An analysis could be made which reflected both the broader viewpoints coming from a larger number of participants, and the perceptions of a select number of participants regarding these viewpoints. It therefore fitted with the purpose of this investigation to use mixed methodology which revealed different aspects of the objectives of the study. The research strategy was to use more than one type of research method and these were a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods; however, as Brannen (nd) argues, these could also have been a mix of qualitative methods or a mix of quantitative methods, the main point being that different types of data were being utilised.

There were three main phases identified for this study: the initial data collection followed by the questionnaire and then by the interviews. Using a mixed methods approach enabled

the quantitative and qualitative research to be linked and allowed triangulation to strengthen the reliability of the results (Hammersley, 1996) and enhance the credibility of the findings ((Hesse-Biber, 2010). Apart from triangulation showing how different data analyses come to the same conclusion and thus validate the results, there is a need for the researcher to consider what kind of knowledge they seek to generate (Brannen, nd): in this study, there was more than one research question to be investigated and there was therefore an argument for using different methods to explore these questions.

The use of mixed methods in this study refers to qualitative and quantitative approaches; however, within these approaches there are differences in the actual methods being used. The initial data collection used cards to elicit information from the participants. It was not a questionnaire as it was requesting participants to divulge data, and this relied on the identification of issues without providing specific stimulus. The data collection included a quantitative approach in the use of the questionnaire and numerical data was able to be collected. This was then supported by different qualitative approaches; the open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire led to more in-depth data being collected. There were also two different kinds of interviews, encompassing focus groups and individuals. Additionally, the comparative data from the Dutch participants were taken from an outsider-researcher perspective, as opposed to the insider-researcher position of the author in Libya. These multiple methods consequently added to the rich data that were made available in this study. The use of multiple methods can strengthen all of the methods used as they complement each other (Byrne & Humble, 2007). Multiple sources of data can provide different interpretations and perspectives of a problem and allow a more detailed analysis.

## **ii. Sequential Approach**

The aim in this study was to use these methods sequentially using a Likert scale and open question survey followed by semi-structured interviews. A Likert five-point scale enables categories to be placed in a ranked relationship (Denscombe, 2005) and this measurement can then be fused with opinion collected by means of other methods (Cohen et al, 2007). The open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire *“can catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour which...are the hallmarks of qualitative data”* (Cohen et al, 2007: 349). This would then allow the survey to be analysed and areas of



concern highlighted so that the ensuing interviews could target these areas of concern. It was anticipated that there would be a certain amount of integration and that more insight into the identified issues would come from both the open questions and the interviews. Using semi-structured interviews keeps the focus on the issues being addressed, yet allows the interviewee to expand and develop ideas (Denscombe, 2005). These methods were therefore a good fit for the collection of data which required identification of issues and then more insight into the causes of these issues.

This sequential approach is also linked to grounded theory. As the data were analysed and the issues were identified, then further investigation took place. The areas of concern were disclosed as more probing occurred; the theory obtained was grounded in the data being analysed and further investigated. Although these data were obtained sequentially, they were constantly subjected to comparison with emerging categories and were collected over time (Ke & Wenglensky, 2010). As the political environment was changing so rapidly, grounded theory was the most appropriate methodological framework; this allowed new data to be explored as analysis of existing data was informing the next collection of data. The data were constantly being refined as the political situation was unfolding.

#### **4.3.4 Reflexivity**

A reflexive approach has been underlying this research process. The need to consider how issues of gender, class, age and disability might shape the construction of knowledge guides the researcher as to who gets studied and which questions are asked: this in turn increases the credibility of the research, makes it more realistic and records both the researcher's and the participants' thinking, which may indeed have a deeper significance when analysed (Smith, 2006). Throughout the study, the researcher has also been evaluating the research process, methods and outcomes, and has been able to both situate the project and have a better understanding of the topic by engaging with it (Finlay & Gough, 2003), and has been reflecting on ways in which the study may be strengthened. In using his own personal experience of teaching in a Higher Education establishment in Libya, the author has also been able to engage with the participants and has an enhanced understanding of the issues, the perceptions and the perspective of the participants. There has to be trust between the researcher and the participant, and reflexivity allows the researcher to consider ways to

reassure the participants about the integrity of the study. As Rowan (2005) argues, reflexivity makes the researcher think more subjectively about the topic in realising that whatever applies to the participants may also apply to himself.

Data analysis is a highly reflexive process and Scrivastava & Hopwood (2009) determine that it relies on a systematic and rigorous method whereby the themes and categories are driven by what the researcher needs to know, and how he then interprets the data he has collected; reflexivity then allows the researcher to connect this data with emerging insights and ideas, and subsequently make sense of it. This has been particularly so with the analysis of qualitative data from the interviews, but the author's own knowledge of Libya, of the university, of the teachers, and of the students has made it possible for him to conduct this study and have an understanding of the questions to be posed, the methods to choose, and how to interpret the data.

The author has a background in education which was one of the primary factors in his choosing this area of investigation. It further helps understanding of the issues if there is some clarification of the situation with university admissions in Libya. Although he excelled in science at school and then went on to do a first degree in Biology, he was not able to pursue this line of study. According to the Libyan government at the time, all students were forced to enrol at their nearest university and they had to study subjects which were available to them at that particular university. In his case this was Education, which accounted for his change of direction from sciences to humanities. In 2005 he joined the university staff at a large university as a lecturer in Teaching Methodology, Teacher Training, Measurement & Evaluation, Statistics and Environmental Psychology. Whilst carrying out the Teacher Training role, he had to observe the fourth year Education students and was aware of the poor level of competence of those in the English department. He consequently had to devote more attention to these students and to that department. This resulted in his being appointed Head of the English Department in 2006. It was during his work that he discovered further issues such as timetabling, foreign staff, complaints from students about Asian staff, the broad curriculum across the university and the lack of parity across the Education departments within the university. These were all issues he wanted to explore further and they are the subject of this investigation.

Overall the objectives could not be met without his presence in Libya, to gather information, to select documents, to give presentations, to observe and to immerse himself in the environment in which the research study was taking place. Despite difficult conditions due to the political situation in Libya which occurred in February 2011, the questionnaires were distributed and collected, and interviews were carried out between February and May 2011. This took longer than first anticipated. He had difficulty in accessing interviewees as the country was involved in a civil war, and people were not available as their priorities were directed elsewhere. Communications were problematic. As the airport and borders were closed, travel became very dangerous and he spent considerable time trying to find ways to exit the country and return to the UK in order to be able to start the analysis of the data, which was finally carried out in August 2011.

Patterns, themes and categories emerge because of what the researcher wants to know, and consequently how he then interprets what the data tell him (Scrivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Patton (2002) concludes that there are three main reflexive questions which need to be asked: What do I know and how do I know what I know?; How do my respondents know what they know?; and How do those receiving my findings make sense of what I give them? This reflexivity determines that the author had an understanding of Libyan Higher Education as he had been for some years Head of Department within a Libyan university and indeed was aware of some of the issues involving the teaching of English in such establishments. The respondents were all currently attending Libyan universities and were therefore able to give their views and opinions of an existing situation. In presenting the findings the researcher must be clear about the context of the study and how it fits with other studies, comparing and contrasting and ensuring that the similarities and differences are put into perspective so that the audience can relate to the investigation.

Without having such understanding of the educational system, there would have been difficulty in gaining access to the establishments in which the data collection took place, as an outsider would not have known how to get the required permissions, nor would he have been so welcome in such establishments. The author was therefore able to gain access to respondents who might otherwise have been denied to him. In some ways this insider research can be construed as less objective than research carried out by an outsider (Simnel, 1950) but others argue that an insider has more access to open discussion and can make

more meaning of the data (Shah, 2004; Zinn, 1979). On the other hand, Merton (1972) considers that being an insider or outsider makes no difference to the richness of the data. Hammersley (1993: 219) suggests that *“there are no overwhelming advantages to being an insider or outsider. Each position has advantages and disadvantages”*. Indeed Oakley (1981) and Logan (1984) believe that shared experiences and views can actually build up trust between interviewer and interviewee. Interpretation of the data collected may have been constructed in a way that was meaningful to the researcher, but it is also likely that more meaning was able to be taken from the data because of the researcher’s insider knowledge.

The author was aware that he was an insider and yet also an outsider. He was studying a group to which he belonged as he also had come through the same education system, he had been a student the same as the students he was surveying. In addition, he had then been working in a Higher Education establishment as a teacher just like the ones he was interviewing; he had then risen to a position of authority, and could understand the viewpoints of the management he also interviewed. However, he had then become an outsider as he had moved away from this environment and was able to see things more objectively. In many ways he then felt apart from those he was interviewing. Nevertheless, he did belong to the same cultural background as the group he was researching. Using qualitative methodologies, he was able to ask relevant questions as he had a better understanding of the potential issues. DeLyser (2001) suggests that insider-researchers may even conceptualise themselves as co-investigators or facilitators in an effort to minimise the power differential between interviewer and interviewee; whilst Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) give three key advantages to being an insider. One is that there is a superior understanding of the group’s culture, which was understandably so in the author’s case. Secondly, the insider-researcher is able to interact naturally with the group, and the author was always able to interact with all members of the research group as he knew their backgrounds. Thirdly, an insider has the ability to have a closer relationship with the members of the group, and the author felt that the interviewees were more than happy to disclose their views and opinions to him.

There are equally disadvantages to being an insider (Breen, 2007). One of these issues is that an insider is not so objective and this can lead to assumptions being made, which may or may not be correct (DeLyser, 2001). Further assumptions can be that all participants are

going to be from the same background, therefore they will have the same feelings about the issues. One of the challenges about being an insider-researcher is that it can create a barrier between researcher and participants, as the researcher can seem to be in a position of power; however, efforts to alleviate this can result in the researcher not creating enough distance between himself and the participants. Kanuha (2000) also suggests that an insider-researcher can be distracted by reflecting personally on what the interviewee is saying instead of focusing on the interview; she also argues that communication can be compromised as the interviewer and interviewee have so much shared understanding, and much can be left unsaid. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the author would not have been able to carry out this research unless he were an insider, especially when the political problems caused such major unrest in Libya. Foreigners were not safe in the country, and certainly the participants would not have spoken to a foreigner. Despite the challenges that insider research may present, it is sometimes the only way to collect data pertaining to a particular research group.

#### **4.3.5 Reliability and Validity**

To ensure reliability and validity of the research, it is beneficial if triangulation can be carried out; Golafshani (2003) suggests this will lead to more valid and reliable data and using a mixed methods approach is applicable for the gathering of data. This is in line with the way this particular project has been investigated. The validity of the research lies in the way that the questions were presented to the respondents and the reliability in the consistency of the responses. However, Morse et al (2002) argue that the responsiveness of the researcher is paramount; the researcher must check and question all data and be prepared to relinquish any ideas that are not properly supported. If the research questions and methods are not congruent, then they may need to be modified, and sampling plans may be expanded to meet the objectives of the research (Morse et al, 2002). The sample being used for this study was appropriate, and therefore valid, as the participants had knowledge of the topic. In addition the data was collected and analysed concurrently to see what was known and what the researcher needed to know. By ensuring that these processes were in place, and that they were carried out throughout the investigation, it meant that adjustments could be made when needed. Ongoing monitoring gave rigour to the study. In

particular, the piloting of the survey questions enabled both reliability and validity to be confirmed.

Reliability focuses on the consistency of the data and it is validated by the data coming from various sources. In this study the data has been collected from surveys, individual interviews and focus group interviews, and coming from these different sources enhances the validity of the data. Rubin & Babbie (2011) argue that the interviews themselves are studying and describing things in depth and detail, and these are coming from multiple perspectives, so that such qualitative data are actually giving better validity than quantitative measurements. It is not possible to have validity without consistency and this investigation has benefited from the three field visits to collect data over a period of time; these have allowed responses to be compared and contrasted, and ultimately to validate the research which has taken place.

With the reliability or consistency of results depending on the quality of information collected from the survey questions, it is essential that the respondents understand the question (Alwin 2007) and every effort was made during the building and developing of the questionnaire to ensure that the questions were comprehensible, by testing out on a select number of Libyan teachers and students. This piloting also checked that the questions were asked in such a way that they would provide responses which were appropriate for the objectives of the study. Alwin (2007) confirms that most survey questions are closed-ended, but argues that more accurate results can come from open-ended questions; the questionnaires for this particular investigation combined both closed and open-ended questions.

Babbie (2010) reflects that field research can present underlying problems with reliability as researchers tend to go to familiar people and places, but he also says that this can be addressed by using qualitative techniques. The author agrees that the respondents may have been familiar in that they were at a university where he had access to them because of his previous position as Head of Department, but he can also argue that the university students and teachers in any of the Libyan universities are from similar backgrounds and the same questionnaires and interviews carried out in any university across Libya would present the same results. Babbie (2007) concedes that a researcher's understanding is what

breathes life and meaning into the analysis, and without this awareness and understanding of the environment in which he was conducting the study, the author would not have been able to compare and evaluate the results for reliability, nor to carry out the interviews to give validity. As discussed earlier, the author agrees that he had an insider approach, but would argue that this is what enabled him to access the respondents and to make insightful meaning of the data.

Cohen et al (2007) suggest that validity should be seen as a matter of degree and that research will never be one hundred per cent valid, but instead efforts should be made to minimise invalidity. It is most important to have confidence in the results (Hammersley, 1992), the soundness of the research design and credibility of the data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). By using more than one method of data collection, in this case by questionnaires and by interviews, then it has been possible to show through triangulation that the same results have been generated and that there can be confidence in these results (Cohen et al, 2007).

Generally there were three phases of research in this study. The first was exploratory, being the initial data collection. The second was the detailed data collection through the questionnaires and interviews and the third was validation through the focus groups with representatives from all three groups. It is this third phase of member validation which increases reliability and validity. In being able to carry out more sampling in December 2011 and in October 2012, including a focus group with teaching staff, the validation of this study was strengthened. Strauss & Corbin (1998) gave the three phases of grounded theory as being 1 – Open sampling, 2 – Selected sampling and 3 – Discriminate sampling (used purposely). These are techniques of theoretical sampling, where concepts emerge from analysis and appear to have relevance. Charmaz (2006) looks at the fit between the initial research interests and the emerging data, where preconceived ideas and theories are not forced upon the data, but that the theories are following the leads which are emerging from the data. This study was dependent on the data emerging from the initial data collection to shape the questionnaires and the interview questions, and there was a constant analysis of data to inform the research objectives.

The timings of the three data collection interview stages have also served to add reliability and validity to the study. There has been a consistency in the data which would not have been so evident through use of the data collected only in the first interviews carried out in February 2011. The research instrument has produced consistency in the same data (Denscombe, 2005) and any variations in the results have been obtained through the impact of the external political situation.

The study was carried out in Libya and the sample was originally to have involved two main universities, both of which had large English language departments. These universities were chosen as they were representative of Libyan Higher Education institutes from a geographic perspective. One of the universities had over forty five thousand students and between two thousand five hundred and three thousand members of staff. However, because of the political situation in Libya at the time, it was not possible to access this university. Instead the study focused on another university of similar size. This is located in an area to the west of Tripoli and it also has around forty five thousand students with between one thousand and fifteen hundred members of staff. Within the institution, the Faculties of Education were approached, and students, teachers, and university staff from these faculties were interviewed. Libyan universities are very similar. There is no choice for students; if they wish to go to university, they are allocated to the one nearest to them. Consequently the student mix is the same at any of the universities, and the change in access to the universities had no impact on the study.

#### **4.4 Summary and Conclusion**

The literature surrounding the issues of English in Higher Education combined with the data collected from the exploratory scoping of the landscape served to identify and corroborate specific areas of concern. These were then formulated into a questionnaire which was reviewed and revised after extensive testing and then given out to students and staff at the selected university to complete. There were both scaled questions and open-ended questions to elicit required information. Following the questionnaires a number of interviews took place, against a political background which created some difficulties but did not prevent the collection of data for the study. Analysis of the data then took place and further questions were raised, but the situation in Libya was unsafe, and it was felt that these questions would need to be the subject of another research project. However, at the



end of 2011 another visit to Libya was arranged, and interviews and a focus group meeting took place in order to complete the investigation. The whole study has taken place against a background of change in Libya and the later interviews reflect this change. All the results will be discussed in the next chapters.

The next chapter explores the importance of English to Libyans and the perceptions that are changing in this transitional period of Libya's history.

## **Chapter 5 Teaching English in a Changing Libya**

### **5.1 Introduction**

One of the areas being investigated in this study is the importance of the English language to Libyans. This chapter explores Libyan perceptions and practices related to the teaching and learning of English. It is especially relevant today as Libya is entering a transitional period and is seeking to place itself in an international context. Perceptions towards the learning of English in Libya are changing and the chapter investigates the role of English as a communication tool and the reasons for students wanting to study English at university.

In having a structure which encourages language learning, and embraces the potential for its graduates to learn English, an educational system can thereby help to build a foundation for understanding the importance of English in today's world. However, it is also important that young people have the motivation to learn English; the availability of opportunities for using English impacts on motivation, as does the prospect of a well-paid job. This chapter therefore explores areas such as digital communication, where young people may increase their opportunities for using the English language, and other incentives such as employment in international companies, whereby motivation may be enhanced.

Attitudes towards learning English cannot be underestimated as this affects relationships between teachers and learners, as well as interaction between learners. It also impacts on the importance and value of English to young Libyans, as negative attitudes may result in students having no interest in learning the language. Consequently they may not be able to evaluate the importance of English. Libya is a developing country and it has also been isolated from the international community in recent years, which may also affect attitudes towards learning English. Therefore, in order to evaluate the impact English has on a developed country, the opinions of Dutch students in Higher Education are compared with the Libyans.

This chapter concludes with an appraisal of the importance of English language to Libyans and the infrastructure in place to support the understanding and motivation for learning English.

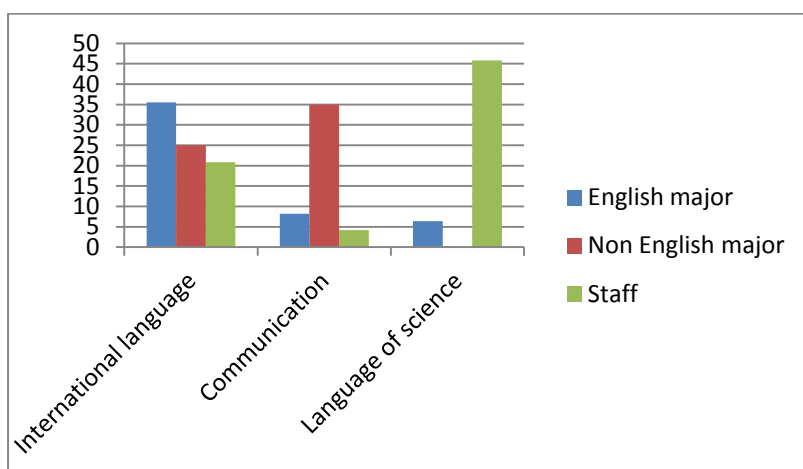
## 5.2 Changing Perceptions of English

There is general consensus that English is important for Libyan students. From the sample which was taken in February 2011, thirty five per cent of students studying English as a major subject at university gave their reason for learning English as being that it was an international language, or the second language all over the world. However, only twenty five per cent of the students who were not studying English as their major subject agreed with this, showing that the degree of importance may depend on other factors: they gave communication as their top reason. This may indicate individual aspirations. Surprisingly, just eight per cent of the English major students chose communication as a reason for learning the language. It is interesting to note that the university staff did not view the importance of English in the same way. However, in some ways the university staff views here reflect the Libyan culture, which Orafi (2008) describes as a culture whereby children and young people are not expected to participate in adult discussions. There is consequently no tradition of interaction and good communication within the classroom.

I think it is very important not only for Libyan students but for all students all over the world. English being an international language is a very important and useful tool for everybody and for all the students in acquiring different fields and areas of science and technology. **Ahmed university teaching staff, February 2011**

Ahmed sees English as a tool for studies in science and technology, not as a vibrant and dynamic means of communication. This may have an impact on the perception of their students towards the value of English. Whilst forty five per cent of university staff believe that English language is important for Libyan students because it is the language of science, it does not reflect the reason it is important to the students themselves.

The fact that those not studying English as their major subject regard communication as a primary reason for learning English indicates that they have an underlying understanding of the importance of English in their lives. Equally, it is a cause for concern that the English majors put so little value on communication. Their choice of English as a major when they entered university seems to have been a random decision based on the current popularity of the English language. There is no long-term strategy in choosing English language as a major in order to fulfil an ambition, or to prepare for a future job. The decision appears to have been made simply because friends were choosing English because it was a popular language at the moment.



**Figure 11** Importance of English language for Libyans February 2011

The interviews with university staff in December 2011, after the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, revealed changes in these perspectives. Whereas the earlier surveys revealed a reluctance of staff to indicate any interest in English outside an academic involvement, they were now much more open and prepared to talk more freely about their feelings. The views are also changing, albeit slowly. Ahmed was interviewed both before and after the so-called ‘Arab Spring’; in the first interview he spoke about English being an international language, therefore it was important for Libyans and all others to have a knowledge of English, and mentioned scientific reasons. Yet in the second interview, he was much more specific.

I mean most people want to learn English because they know the advantages of learning it. **Ahmed, university teaching staff, December 2011**

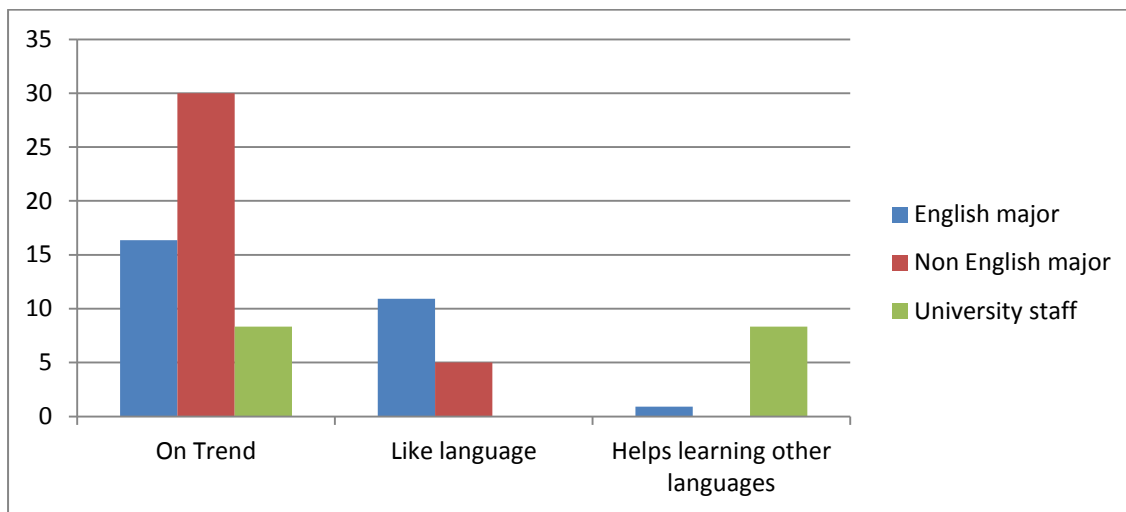
For the first time, he acknowledges that there is a desire for Libyans to learn English. He is focusing on the intrinsic motivation, which is an essential part of adult learning (Wlodkowski, 2008), and which had been suppressed under Gaddafi. As Wlodkowski (2008:2) argues, motivation is something which is insubstantial, but which can be inferred from the words people use, such as “want to”. Ahmed is expressing the idea that there is a purpose to the learning of English, and this is not just because it is a useful tool for academic study.

Libya has been slow to catch up with the rest of the world in terms of English teaching as Aldabbus (2008) concurs, with the policy of English teaching and learning only coming into its own in the mid 1990s. English language was of course removed from the curriculum in the 1980s and the Oxford Business Group (2008) determines that this is why Libyans are lacking in the communication skills that Khalifa now suggests should be a priority area.

The future is in English language. We are safe in the new Libya, our aim is to build a very good state. How can we communicate with other international countries if we do not have English language? Learning English is very important for everyone around the world and especially now for Libyans. ***Khalifa, university teaching staff, December 2011***

Khalifa reflects the views of the university teaching staff, who previously had been more circumspect in their views on English language learning. It was a political decision to take English off the curriculum in the 1980s, and consequently it was more difficult to express any criticism of that decision under the former regime. However, it is also interesting to note that Khalifa is now suggesting that English should be learnt as a means of communication, which is in contrast to the earlier views in February 2011 (figure 6), when university staff regarded communication as the least important reason for learning English. Communication with other countries was not considered important to Libya under the Gaddafi regime, or at least it was not being expressed that it might be so.

The earlier interviews with students were also more guarded. Other reasons given for learning English in February 2011 (figure 7) were varied but sixteen per cent of the students majoring in English believed it was the trend and eleven per cent simply liked the language. Thirty per cent of those not studying English as their main subject felt it was on trend to be learning the language and just five per cent were doing so because they liked it. Meanwhile eight per cent of the university staff appreciated the trend for English but none felt that liking it was enough reason for studying: instead they took a more academic approach in commenting that learning English helps to learn other languages. Fewer than one per cent of the English major students agreed with this motivator, which in many ways reflects the insular approach to language learning that young Libyans have experienced over the past few years.



**Figure 12** Importance of learning English for Libyans February 2011

It was expected that more would be looking to their future employment prospects within oil companies and other international companies already trading in Libya, but that was not regarded as an important reason for Libyans to learn English. Given that these international companies were recruiting English language speakers and paying premiums for language ability, this was surprising. However, it could also be a reflection of the general down-playing of the importance of English inherent in the Gaddafi regime. This should also be viewed in the context of reports stating that young Libyans are unable to obtain employment due to their lack of languages; “It is important to reiterate that in today’s Libyan market it is English and English alone that is a passport for work” (Maghur, 2010).

### 5.3 Comparison with European students

In order to evaluate the importance of English to Libyan students, a number of Dutch students and staff in the Netherlands were interviewed as a means of comparing the aspirations of young, educated people. They were all connected with the University of Utrecht. The Netherlands is a small country surrounded by much larger countries and it is also primarily a trading country without a large number of resources. Many of the young

people recognised this, and the importance of learning foreign languages to the country in general.

“Speaking languages is government policy in the Netherlands. We learn three foreign languages in High School: German, French and English. It is important for the Dutch economy.” **Liesbet, Dutch researcher, June 2012**

Libya still has to contend with a government policy where English was banned from the curriculum, and there are logistic issues in ensuring that the language is taught in schools at an early age. This contrasts sharply with the Dutch experience, where English is being implemented in schools even earlier than before.

“I learnt English in secondary school at the age of 12, but it is now taught at a younger age.” **Ingrid, Dutch student, June 2012**

Most of the current Dutch students interviewed had started learning English at around the age of 12, but there were some who spoke of their earlier initiation to the language. The impact of an early introduction to English language is described by Bettina:

“English comes naturally to me. I had lessons since the age of 5 in kindergarten.” **Bettina, Dutch student, June 2012**

The ability to use English stays with these early learners and gives them an advantage in many different ways. With a focus group of students in the Netherlands, the discussion on early learning gave information on how English is now taught in primary schools in Germany, and how English has replaced French as the second language in Spanish schools. One woman described how her young son played video games online and communicated with other young players all over the world:

“They all speak English. This is the reality of today”. **Madelon, Dutch editor, June 2012**

There were, nevertheless, very defined reasons given by the Dutch for wanting to learn English and it is these motivational forces which appear to be lacking in the Libyan students. The fact that English is so important for anyone in academic life is noted by all the Dutch respondents. Having access to materials predominantly written in English is one of the main reasons given for having a good knowledge of the language, and it is also necessary to ensure that their own writings are in English.

“English helps us reach a broader audience in academic life. Citations and journals are all written in English.” **Ingrid, Dutch student, June 2012**

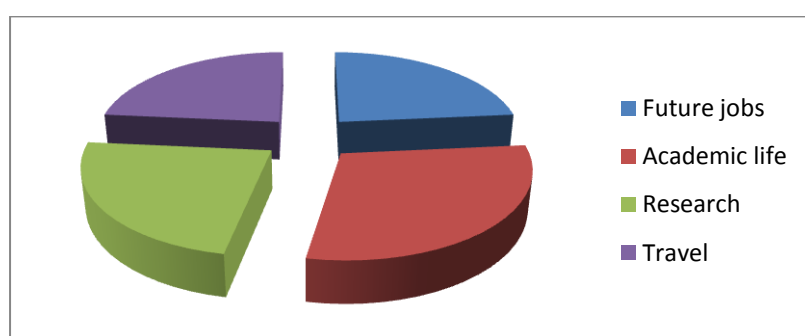
The ability to read and write English at a high academic level was regarded as essential, but the other skills of speaking and listening were also a priority for those wanting to attend international conferences, as these are invariably in English these days.

“English gives us access to international systems of knowledge. 70% of texts are in English. Dutch authors publish only in English to get to a wider audience. You need English to catch global attention. At conferences all the discussions are in English and those who speak English have an advantage.” **Pieter, Dutch university teaching staff, June 2012**

The Dutch have a quite pragmatic attitude to the necessity of English in their academic life.

“We could not go to conferences without English. I studied Psychology and all our textbooks were from the United States.” **Liesbet, Dutch researcher, June 2012**

As the chart indicates (figure 8), research and academic life play a prominent position in the reasons or motivation for Dutch students to learn English. This does bring into question the role of academic life within Libyan universities. If the Dutch are not able to attend conferences without English, then it would be expected that the same would apply to Libyans. It indicates that Libyan academics do not enjoy the same academic freedom of colleagues in other countries. Conferences are regarded as important for exchanging ideas and developing more knowledge, yet Libyans are not considering these as a way of improving their own skills. Nor is it simply the attendance at conferences that is highlighted here. In certain fields all the textbooks are in English, and these are not translated into Arabic (Elhadj, 2006:56), therefore there is much information that is denied to those who cannot function in English.





**Figure 13** Dutch students' reasons for learning English

Even more pertinent were the personal reasons for learning English. The importance of English was evident in their quest for jobs and was regarded as an investment for the future.

“English became my top priority after High School, when I moved to South Africa for a year and was using English all the time. I then spent 6 months in Australia at the end of my first degree, in order to improve my academic English. So it was very useful to be able to improve my conversational English in South Africa and my academic English in Australia. It is valuable for future jobs especially in academia. I can apply in so many countries and will be using English extensively in the future.”

**Pieter, Dutch university teaching staff, June 2012**

The motivation to improve English starts at an early age for these Dutch students; many of them plan on taking a year out between school and university to go to an English speaking country. This shows a long-term commitment to learning a language and indicates the importance of English to the Dutch. They deliberately choose to immerse themselves in an environment where they must speak English, to ensure they make the most of the opportunity of immersing themselves in the culture and language of an English speaking country. As the Netherlands is so close to the UK, it was a surprise to find that they chose countries further away. Pieter chose South Africa and Australia while Liesbet chose the United States. In opting for these more distant countries, it meant that they had to persevere and stay in the country, rather than succumbing to the temptation of constant visits home to the Netherlands.

“I spent one year abroad when I left High School, I went on a one year programme to the United States where I learnt to speak, read and write good English. I had to speak English in a multicultural environment. I need English to know more about the world. My year abroad started an interest in other cultures and English allows me to work in other international countries such as Canada and Singapore.”

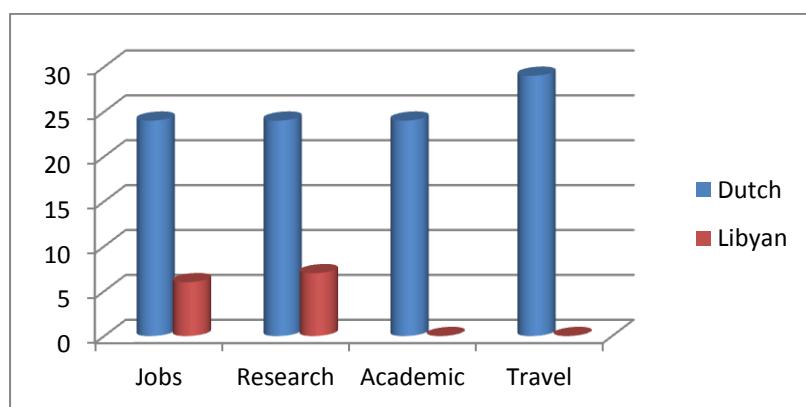
**Liesbet, Dutch researcher, June 2012**

Not every student has the financial resources or opportunity to spend a year abroad, but there are other options. It has become common in the Netherlands to deliver Master's degrees in English. This actually serves to attract larger numbers of international students to the Dutch universities: in 2011/2012 academic year, there were more than eighty seven thousand foreign students in Dutch universities, totalling thirteen per cent of all the student population (Eurogates, nd). It also allows the indigenous students to take advantage of an

English speaking environment within their own country. There is no question that this is an easy option, as the Dutch students do not have the benefit of being able to immerse themselves in the language outside the university environment. They do not get the extra stimulation of every day communication in the real world, so in many ways it means they have to work harder to improve their English language in this way.

*“I did my Master’s degree in English here in the Netherlands because of the international students, and this will help me with working abroad. I am looking for jobs in big companies like Cisco, where they all speak English.” **Ingrid, Dutch student, June 2012***

However difficult this option may be, Ingrid considers it to be worth the effort as it is helping her secure a job in the future. Although the Libyan students also had their classes carried out in English, they did not value this as an opportunity to develop their English language skills in the same way. As discussed later in this chapter, they were more inclined to look at the negatives rather than the positives.



**Figure 14** Comparison of Dutch and Libyan reasons for learning English

The discrepancy seen in Figure 9 between the two sets of students may be partly explained by the late arrival of Libya on the international scene. It has not yet become evident to the Libyan students that there is a wider world in which they can participate; indeed newspaper editorial in the United States (NWF, 2012) argues that Libya is an insular culture. The expectation was that Libyan students would regard working for an international company as a strong motivation for learning English and was therefore surprising that this was not

regarded as very important, especially given that the oil companies in Libya are actively seeking to employ English speakers.

The attitudes of the Dutch and Libyan respondents contrast sharply and this reflects the way in which the Netherlands has been included in an international community for so long. In comparison Libya has been more isolated, and Apps (2011) describes how Libya survived for decades without any Western influences. The Libyans have not had the same opportunities to experience the global freedoms of young Europeans; the repressive rule of the former regime ensured that personal and political opinions were not shared (Stack, 2012; Doherty, 2011). Until quite recently very few studied outside the Arab world, and they have always been expected to return to their own country at the end of their studies. The freedom of choice that the Dutch take for granted has not been available to Libyans (Stack, 2012). This has perhaps led to more limited aspirations on the part of the Libyan students, and in return has impacted on the level of importance they attach to the learning of English: research carried out in November 2011 (Doherty, 2011) suggests that Libyans are now looking outwardly at other countries. Nevertheless, it is surprising that the scholarship programmes, which more recently enabled Libyans to travel to countries such as America, Canada, Australia and the UK, have not been seen as an incentive for learning English.

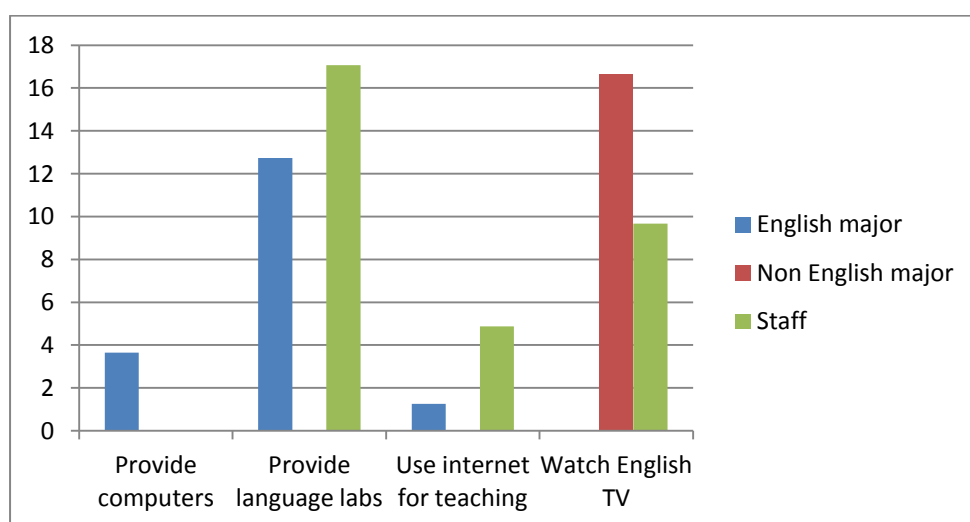
Even within the academic world, there is little thought given to the advantages of English. Research is not regarded highly in the Arab world (Middle East Quarterly, 2002) and it is argued that much of the research that is being carried out simply involves translation of theories and methods from the English speaking world (Almhdie et al, 2005:45). Elhadj (2006:56) comments that the teaching of English in Arab universities is weak and therefore foreign discoveries and ideas are not accessible; nor are foreign books translated into Arabic. Despite the large numbers of students graduating from Arab universities, they produce little in original research or of scientific value (Elhadj, 2006:56), and this appears to be reinforced by the attitudes of Libyan students towards the learning of English for research.

## 5.4 Digital Communication

The internet is now a huge influence on young people across the world, including in the Arab countries. Al-Jenaidi (2011) shows the dramatic increase in use of social media sites in the Arab region, which she says is evidenced by a 136.5% annual growth rate. Access to such communication channels as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter is opening up sources of information previously denied to developing countries, and much of this information is in English. Social media tools have also played their part in the recent uprising in Libya. Scola (2011) argues that the way in which the Libyan government cut public access to the internet was a way of stopping the demonstrators communicating with other parts of the world. Al-Jenaidi's (2011) study points out how people submitted videos and information to news outlets during the 'Arab Spring' as they recognised the limitations of Arab media. However, she also suggests that language barriers can hinder access to social media in general. As internet and broadband become more prevalent in developing countries, then the need for English in order to be able to access global information becomes more important.

At the beginning of 2011, Ahmed was promoting the use of digital technology as a means of keeping students current with their studies in science and technology.

"It is also important as a channel of communication that enables students to keep in touch with developments in the fields of science and technology as I said all over the world." **Ahmed, university teaching staff, February 2011**



**Figure 15** Suggestions for improving teaching of English February 2011

Few of the students surveyed in February 2011 (figure 15) made suggestions that English could be taught via the medium of computer and internet, although the non-teaching staff seemed slightly more enthusiastic. However, this was still fewer than five per cent of the sample. The teaching staff showed no awareness that this could be a more valuable teaching resource than the more dated language laboratories.

Language labs are fixed firmly in the minds of the teaching staff.

*“There is no lab, the biggest problem we have is not having an English lab to practise English.” Khalifa, university teaching staff, December 2011*

This may be because language labs were regarded as aspirational, and were made available in all the educational establishments. However, the staff then watched as these fell into disuse as they were not maintained.

*“Even though we have a small lab here, it is not working and is not used by staff.” Hassan, university administrator, December 2011*

Yet there are also indications that the language labs may not have been utilised even when functional, and this may be one of the reasons why they were not maintained. It is also possible that the teaching staff did not have enough knowledge to be able to use the labs, and that they consequently preferred to carry out classroom teaching instead.

*“Even some colleges have a language lab but these are not used, perhaps just once a year.” Yasser, university teaching staff, December 2011*

A study by Bower (2007) suggests that language labs are no longer required, and that instead all students should regard their computers as a mobile language lab environment. This is more student-centred. However, the evidence from February 2011 also indicates that the students did not have computers provided at university level, as they were suggesting that the provision of computers would enhance the teaching of English.

Nevertheless, by December 2011 Khalifa was advocating the use of the internet for the teaching of English, as well as acknowledging that communication in English was indeed being facilitated by the internet.

*“English is the language of the internet and we communicate via English language on the internet.” Khalifa, university teaching staff, December 2011*

Given that there is so much usage of the internet with young people generally, it appears to be a missed opportunity not to integrate such technology into the teaching of English. However, the resources provided in the universities have been very poor and internet access in Libyan universities has been sporadic. Statistics for 2010 show that only 5.5 per cent of the population had internet access and growth has been much slower than in other African countries (OAFrica, 2011), although by September 2012 internet penetration had risen to 17 per cent (GRID, 2012). When the researcher was in Libya in October 2012, the internet connectivity was even slower than it had been under the previous regime, therefore there are definitely challenges for utilising modern technology. However, in the last few years internet usage, not just for social media, has increased across the Arab region, and this may be a way forward for the future.

Yet digital technology does not need to be just computers and the internet. Suggestions from those not studying English as a major and university staff in Figure 7 include the use of television for improving English language learning. Previous studies have shown that young people spend longer watching television than studying in school (al-Qala, 1987: 110) and many support the idea that television benefits development of language skills among young adults (Alzboon et al, 2011). There have not been many studies on the use of television and radio as a means of teaching, according to Alzboon et al (2011), yet this could be an effective way of encouraging the use of English. Foreign language broadcasts have long been used as a way of communicating with migrant communities and these have been very successfully utilised, so there is no reason why a similar approach cannot be taken to embrace a learning community. From the data in Figure 7, however, it seems that those who are English majors might consider themselves too serious to consider television as a medium for learning, and it may therefore require a campaign to put across the benefits of improving communication skills in this way.

Over recent years there has been the growth of virtual learning environments, or online learning platforms, due to the rapid development of internet and computer technology (Fan, 2011:516). This has been a popular way of making learning more accessible and research has shown that student attitudes towards improving their language skills through video and online text are high (Fan, 2011: 520). However, this is within a global context and, as discussed earlier, Libya is still a long way from being able to utilise such technology,

despite plans to open up the international network market. The main barriers tend to be a lack of technology knowledge among the teachers themselves and little Arabic software (GRID, 2012).

Another technological communication tool not yet fully used in teaching languages is the mobile phone. It has been suggested that these could even serve to replace computers as a low cost alternative (Stockwell, 2010). These have been especially beneficial in the acquisition of vocabulary, although the findings by Stockwell (2010) indicate that most young people still prefer using their computers. It has not been considered as a means of communicating by the staff or students, although current mobile penetration is two hundred and sixty five per cent (GRID, 2012). Ahmed suggests that the aids required for teaching languages are simply not available.

*“Audio visual and other teaching aids that are needed when teaching any foreign language, again these aids do not exist.” Ahmed, university teaching staff, December 2011*

There are signs that these new technologies will be embraced, once the country stabilises. Hassan is looking ahead to a time when modern technology can be introduced.

*“There are no projectors, no Smartboards. Every student should have a personal computer and a personal email address so people can research and do their homework online. There is no internet in Libya, we don’t have the technology. The teachers should improve themselves, they should know about computers and technology.” Hassan, university administrator, December 2011*

The teaching aids that can help to motivate students are ones which can be utilised effectively to provide both enjoyment and education. Power and Shrestha (2010) describe how, despite large investments made by government, the level of English competence among Bangladeshi students and teachers is often low, and they attributed this to the nature of language learning activity in the classroom. One of the suggestions was to investigate mobile technology for language learning. They found that the advantages of using mobile technology outweighed that of traditional desktop computers as it meant less dependence on the infrastructure of the learning site (Power et al, 2010). Ownership of mobile phones is ubiquitous and it is a solution that has not yet been identified by the Libyan teachers, yet using such technology could prove to be a strong motivating factor in the learning of English. Mobiles were used to deliver audio materials to students and both

audio and video materials to teachers for their professional development in a Bangladeshi initiative and there were distinct changes in classroom practice as a result; teachers and students were talking more in English (Shaheen & Lace, 2013). Simple solutions which have worked in other developing countries may also prove effective in Libya.

## **5.5 Attitudes towards Learning English**

If the new technology is introduced into Libyan classrooms, it may well provide the incentive for motivating students to learn English. Computer assisted language learning has already been shown to promote a positive attitude to learning English as a foreign language in the United Arab Emirates (Almekhlafi, 2006). Living in a global economy and modern communication systems allow more access to other cultures and therefore interaction in other languages (Gibby, 2007), especially in English. This is in itself an incentive, and supports the earlier comments made in the Dutch focus group, where young people are communicating in English while playing games online with others around the world.

There is also evidence that providing career development services links education with the labour market and ensures that young people are properly informed and prepared about choices they have for future job opportunities (OECD, 2009). Students then have a clear pathway set out for them and can recognise the importance of studying for qualifications best suited to their future job aspirations. In turn this increases motivation as there is then a purpose to learning. Rodriguez-Chamussy et al (2012:94) indicate that the returns on proficiency in language skills are substantial and earnings will be much higher. In Libya there were limitations on earnings, and therefore such incentives were negated. These will only take effect should Libya look to reward government employees for their skills. However, Rodriguez-Chamussy et al (2012) do agree that there are likely to be intrinsic motivations as well and acknowledge that there is a body of thought which believes that financial motivations can in fact be detrimental to intrinsic motivations. On the other hand, Arnold et al (2005) argue that intrinsic motivations are most favourable for long-term retention, and these should be encouraged to promote autonomous learning and a positive attitude towards the learning experience.

A positive attitude towards learning a language is seen as a prime area of concern by the university staff interviewed in December 2011.



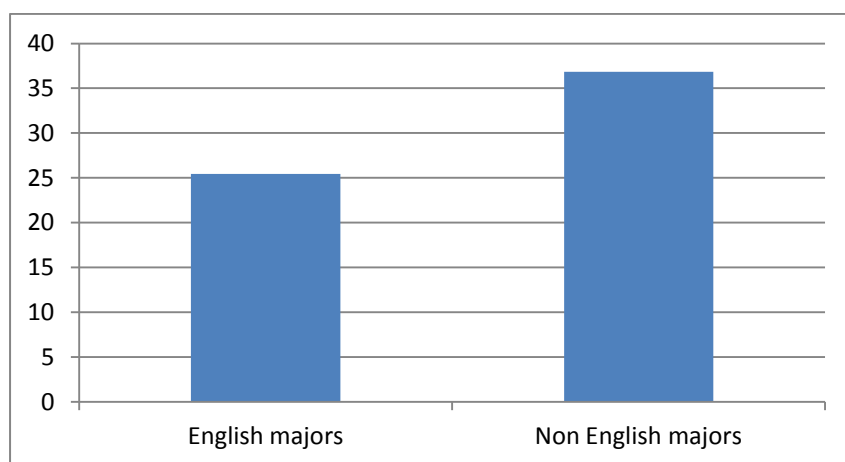
“There are other things which should be a point of concern, trying to create the right attitude, the students’ willingness to study, because obviously if you’re not interested in doing something, you cannot do it well. We know that someone who is interested, really interested in learning a language, will be somehow at an advantage, he will learn fast or more say quickly than the others who are just doing the course because it’s part of the syllabus they are doing, not because they want to. So we need to create that willingness, the right attitude, to learning a foreign language. But I think the willingness is there.” **Ahmed, university teaching staff, December 2011**

Youssef (2012) reports that there is generally a low motivation level among students and teachers in Libya, as well as a negative attitude towards learning English. The focus group in November 2011 also suggested that there was a negative attitude towards English in their students. Youssef (2012) argues that introducing English into Libya may be subject to resistance because Arabic is already a well-established, functioning and effective language system, and this resistance is evidenced by low motivation and negative attitude. Additionally, Youssef (2012) suggests that English is associated with the Western world and relations between Libya and the West may have been another de-motivating factor.

Attitudes towards foreign language learning are also particularly negative if the student perception of the usefulness of that language is low. Bartram (2010) argues that in the UK there is no perceived connection between languages and improved employment prospects, but he also suggests that a key factor in negative attitudes is a lack of enjoyment in learning a foreign language. Languages are seen as difficult. This is confirmed by the Libyan students. Nearly thirty seven per cent of those not studying English as a major subject find the language difficult, and twenty-five per cent of those whose main subject at university is English also find it difficult (figure 16). The study by Bartram (2010) contrasts English-speaking attitudes to modern foreign languages with German and Dutch attitudes and finds that, although they may not enjoy learning a language, the usefulness of it is the key to more positive attitudes in German and Dutch learners. It is this perception of difficulty in learning a foreign language which impacts on the enjoyment of learning, and consequently the attitudes towards language learning. However, as Bartram (2010) implies, if the students can see a purpose to learning, then their attitudes will become more positive.

However, Youssef (2012) found that seventy per cent of the Libyan high school students in his study had a positive attitude towards learning English, although he did relate this to the

relevance of the English language in the modern world. A positive attitude tends to strengthen motivation and consequently is a significant factor in teaching and learning languages (Youssef, 2012).



**Figure 16** Difficulties learning English February 2011

As Ahmed suggests, creating interest in learning can also impact on attitude; if students are not interested, then they are not going to learn. He argues that teachers need to create that interest. One of the ways in which interest can be focused on language learning has been found to be the use of introducing authentic materials into the classroom, so that students can see there is a real purpose to their learning. Purushotma (2005) suggests embedding language instruction into games, browsing the internet, and music in order to capture the interest of young people. There has also been much work across Europe on content and language integrated learning (CLIL) where a subject is taught using the foreign language as the medium of communication. Dalton-Puffer et al (2012: 12) suggest that this has potential as a language learning environment and has not yet been fully exploited.

Interest in learning English in the classroom can be developed. More problematic is the attitude to education itself. The culture of Arab education as a process of learning aimed at passing exams (Aldabbus, 2008) is entrenched in the minds and traditions, and it has become evident throughout the various educational stages. Yasser's comments also resonate with Orafi's (2008) findings that Libyan families take great pride in gaining top

marks in exams. Orafi (2008) goes further to state that the teacher's role is to get students to pass exams, otherwise they are held responsible for failure, but Yasser does not seem to be intimidated by this.

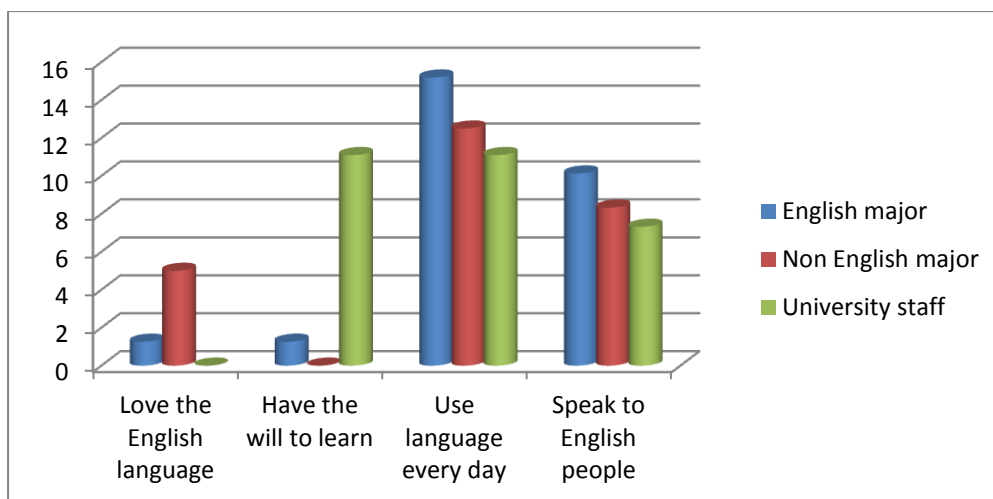
*"Motivation needs incentives. Sometimes our students come to university only to pass an exam and this is not an effective learning environment." Yasser, university teaching staff, December 2011*

Personal motivation still seems to be the key factor in inspiring students to learn. There must be an element of personal responsibility for learning. If there has been too much external control over learning, then it can destroy the feeling of empowerment that learning autonomy can give (Sullo, 2007: 8). Sullo (2007:14) also advocates the concept of learning for enjoyment and argues that classroom environments should engage students in learning by attracting their intrinsic motivation. Figure 17 indicates that there is a foundation for activating this motivation. The English majors are eager to use their English language skills and both the university staff and the students studying another major agreed that using English every day was a way of increasing their interest in learning. It is noticeable that the university staff deem a willingness to learn a key motivator, while the students themselves do not see this as important. This may be that the students consider themselves already motivated. A number of students majoring in other subjects feel that a love of the English language can increase interest. This may well be an indicator of personal motivation, as they have selected English as an additional subject.

It is not unrealistic to suggest that there are already incentives and motivations within the groups of students interviewed in February 2011 (Figure 17). These may, however, need to be realised and this then brings into question the role of the teacher. There is a possibility that the teachers themselves may not understand the existing motivations of their own students.

The teaching staff appear to be more critical of the motivations, or indeed what they see as a lack of motivation, in their students than in trying to understand why they are currently studying English.

*"If you want someone to listen to you, they should have motivation and incentives, a desire to learn." Hassan, university administrator, December 2011*



**Figure 17** Increasing interest in English language learning February 2011

The desire to learn may depend more on developing positive relationships between teachers and students (Sullo, 2007: 18), rather than seeing the students as disinterested and dis-incentivised. However, there may be barriers to building such relationships, and one of these is the size of the classes, which is discussed further in the next chapter.

## 5.6 Summary and Conclusion

Although there is a general perception that the English language is important to Libyans, there remains some confusion as to why this may be so and the benefits of learning English. The students studying English as a major have indicated that they consider English to be an international language. However, they do not link this to any future prospects, such as employment, nor do they see it as a communication tool. These would be natural reasons for choosing to study a foreign language, and indeed are indicators that there is a strong motivational link between study and the labour market. This appears to be lacking in the Libyan students.

There are possible causes for this. Libya has been insulated from the international world for some years and this may still have an impact on the exposure to opportunities afforded by English language skills. When the survey was carried out, it was at the very start of the so-called Arab Spring. The country was at that time firmly in the grip of the Gaddafi regime, and students were perhaps more accepting of the progression routes which were available

to them. Additionally, it has been argued that Higher Education Institutes across the Arab world do not produce graduates to meet the needs of their society (Al-Rashdan, 2009: 4).

There are changes in the attitudes of staff between February 2011 and December 2011, when the second tranche of interviews were carried out. In February, the staff do not regard English as a communication tool. They promote it instead as a means of access to scientific and technological materials. However, by December they are already talking about English being important as it is a means of communication with other international countries. The staff are looking to the future where a new Libya takes its place in the international world.

It is when the Libyan students are compared to Dutch students that the contrasts between a developed and a developing country are seen. The freedom enjoyed by the Dutch students has resulted in a confidence that is not evident in the Libyan students. In the Netherlands the Dutch students understand the importance of English and are prepared to start learning younger, to spend time in foreign countries at a relatively young age in order to perfect their English language skills, and to take every opportunity for using English. Ultimately, the Dutch are motivated by the link between English language proficiency and their future employment.

Opportunities for practising English are limited, and the non-English majors are the ones who would prefer to have English language centres where they could communicate and use their language skills. Those taking English as a major do not believe they need extra opportunities, although it is noted that they do not consider communication to be a reason for learning a language. There appears to be a more theoretical rather than practical approach to English language learning from the English major students. This is in keeping with the Arab culture of education being a process for passing exams (Aldabbus, 2008). The difference between the two sets of students may lie in their motivation for learning English. English majors see English as an international language, but the non-English majors see it as a means of communication. It appears that the non-English majors have more understanding of the benefits that may result from the acquisition of English. Although these may not relate to employment, they do show an understanding of English being on trend, and therefore of value to them in some way.

It is possible that this value may relate to digital communication, as so many young people now have access to the internet, email, and social media. There seems to have been a missed opportunity in Libyan universities of harnessing this interest in digital communication and using it as a teaching tool. This could reinforce the importance of English in a global world.

The next chapter explores the environment in which English language teaching takes place in Libya.

## **Chapter 6 Landscape for Teaching English**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The environment in which English is being taught in Libya is significant among the challenges being faced by teachers in Higher Education. Resources and facilities have a considerable impact on the quality of what is being delivered and can also affect the motivation and enthusiasm of both teachers and students for learning English. In previous chapters it has been shown how the political landscape has had a long-lasting and negative impact on English language teaching; the way that English was cut out of the Libyan curriculum in 1986 has resulted in poor English skills of the teachers currently teaching English in Libyan schools. This in turn leads to students arriving at university with a level of English below acceptable entry standards. There are few opportunities for Libyan students to have any exposure to the English language outside educational institutions and therefore there are very limited possibilities to practise the language (Ahmad, 2012). Consequently it is important to recognise that the environment within which English is being taught is one which is not necessarily conducive to learning.

This chapter explores the material environment and investigates the resources available to teachers. It also explores the cultural background and the traditions which support teaching in Libya. Along with other developing countries, Libya is looking to prepare its workforce to take its place in a global economy, where English language competence may be a necessary skill in the future. It therefore needs to investigate the barriers to students achieving English language competence.

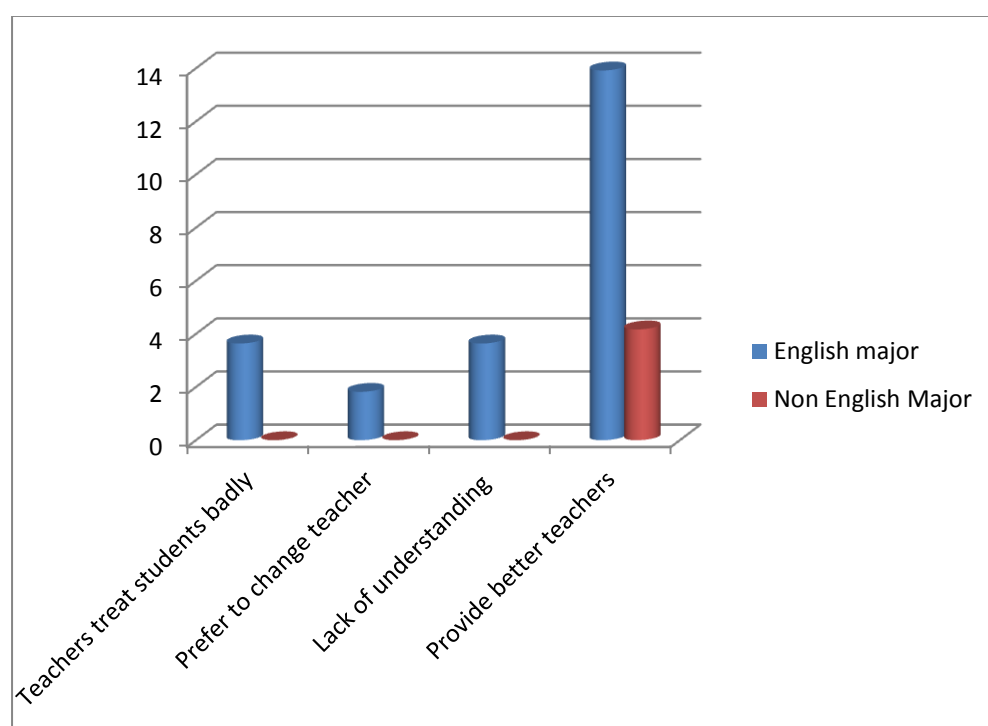
Additionally, the teaching staff are pivotal in their role as leaders in motivating the learners, and this chapter explores how teachers are trained and how teaching skills are updated to meet the demands of a changing world.

### **6.2 Facilities**

Libya has suffered from a rapid increase in university students and not being able to provide the facilities to accommodate them. Large class sizes is one of the factors identified as contributing to lower quality outputs across the Arab region (Sahraoui, 2008; Herrera & Torres, 2006) and this is a source of concern to the Libyan university teaching staff.

**“The numbers of the students can reach 45 in one classroom.” Sarah, university teaching staff, December 2011**

The students surveyed in February 2011 made no direct mention of class size being an issue. However, there were subliminal references in their comments about their relationship with their teacher. This can be taken as an indication that the teacher has not been able to develop a relationship properly with the students because there are too many in the class to provide individual support.



**Figure 18** Relationship with teachers February 2011

It is noticeable that the English majors are the ones who are most affected by the relationship between teacher and student (figure 18). This may be because they depend on the teacher more for developing their skills and knowledge and that they feel this lack of good relationships may mean poor grades for them. It is also noticeable that both groups comment on the teachers not being very good. Researchers have shown that a breakdown in relationships can occur when teachers place themselves in a “we-they” position, and this can impact on the likeability factor (Marzano et al, 2003:42). How students feel about a



teacher can influence what they learn (Leamson, 1999:71). More importantly, when students believe they are being properly supported by a teacher, through frequent and specific feedback and direction, then they are more likely to find learning less challenging (Chen et al, 2010:133). Learner-centred teaching has been shown to result in more positive student outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007: 134) and Yorke (2003) confirms that formative feedback achieves a high success rate.

The size of the class does have an effect on relationships with the teacher, as Blatchford's (2003:2) study shows; teachers of smaller classes are able to have more individual support and they are given immediate feedback and guidance. Interactions in larger classes often mean that the teacher is more severe and the class subdued (Blatchford, 2003:2). This aligns with the teaching style in the Libyan universities, which is predominantly teacher-centred, and may help to explain why this style of teaching is more appropriate when dealing with the very large class sizes, which all the teaching staff identify.

"We have a problem with the number of students, we have very big, very large sized classes, where you have 30 or 40 students where it's not possible in a second or foreign language environment as we know, so the high number, the large number of students in a class will not help, would not make it possible for us to do the job teaching them. In any foreign or second language environment the class sizes shouldn't be more than 15, possibly 12 or something like that, not 40 or 50 which would make it a waste of time" **Ahmed, university teaching staff, February 2011**

It is especially important in foreign language teaching that class sizes are small because interaction is needed to promote communication. Murray et al (2010: 37) suggest that many students enrol in private schools to develop their communicative language skills as it is not possible for teachers to use a communicative approach in large classes. The Libyan students who were English majors did not seem to find the large classes a problem, but it is interesting that over forty two per cent of those who were not studying English as a major subject decried the lack of English language centres in Libya. There are very few language centres in Tripoli, although more recently most of the main universities have started to open English language centres under the supervision of the British Council. However, these centres are not open to the public and only university students can be registered for English language seminars.

The reason for nearly half the non-majoring in English students to want an English language centre can only be surmised, but it would not be unrealistic to suggest that their motivation for learning English extends to being able to use the language in communicative and functional situations. The class sizes within the university make this very difficult. Ahmed confirms the ideal numbers for foreign language classes and the class sizes they, as teachers, are expected to teach.

“Obviously we know that when teaching foreign languages the student numbers in a class are always expected to be smaller and numbers something like 15, 12, 18 something below 20, which is not the case in our universities. You always or usually find students in classes of up to 50, 60 or sometimes even higher where obviously teaching a foreign language cannot be done this way. We need smaller classes or smaller class number sizes. This will obviously help and this is a prerequisite, this is a condition that we all know in teaching foreign languages, that we cannot teach foreign languages to groups of as I said 50, 60, 40, something like this cannot be done.” **Ahmed, university teaching staff, December 2011**

Khalifa corroborates these exceptionally large numbers in classes. Although it can be common for large numbers of students to attend lectures of a more theoretical nature, it is different for modern foreign language teaching, where the purpose of instruction is giving the learners the ability to communicate in another language. Unless there is interaction afforded by small class sizes, then the teaching of English becomes more theory rather than communication. This impacts on the attitudes of the students, who then feel they are focusing on grammar and not learning a language to be able to use it.

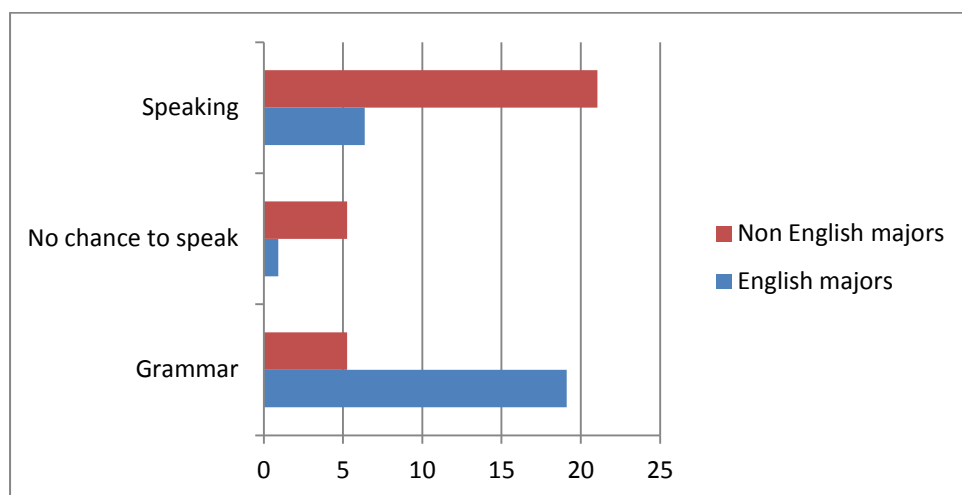
The numbers of students in the classroom, very, very big numbers, 50 or 60 students in one classroom. It can reach 70 or 80 in a very small classroom. It is against the fundamentals of teaching. **Khalifa, university teaching staff, December 2011**

As previously mentioned, class sizes have been extremely large, and the rooms where the teaching takes place are not equipped to cope with such large numbers. Some teachers have suggested that there may be up to one hundred students in their class and the rooms are meant to hold about a quarter of that number.

The class sizes reflect on the motivation of the teachers as well. Where there is no personal connection with their students, they are not so motivated to deliver lessons relevant to those learners. Cornelius-White (2007: 134) argues that students and teachers motivate each other as it is a two-way process, and that student achievement and success leads to

better teacher behaviour. There is a theme throughout all the teaching staff interviews that they are being asked to teach such large classes against all good practice in the teaching of English.

The other main issue is the number of students in the classroom. It is high, very high, above the standard. *Yasser, university teaching staff, December 2011*



**Figure 19** Most challenging about learning English February 2011

When the students were asked about the challenges in learning English, there is a distinct contrast between the English majors and the non-English majors (figure 19). Although the teachers complained about the class sizes, the English major students appear to be comparatively satisfied with their speaking abilities. However, they emphasise that they find grammar most challenging. This may indicate that the focus in their classes is actually on grammar, and not on speaking. Their reasons for not finding speaking a challenge may well be because speaking activities are not being carried out in the classroom. On the other hand, the non-English majors find speaking and the opportunities for using the language more challenging. This matches up with why forty-two per cent of them want more English language centres in Libya. This may be due to class size, but it could also be due to the quality of the teachers in the classroom. Khalifa describes the situation from her perspective. There is serious overcrowding and the number of students causes other problems, which may account for the students coming late to class,

Classrooms are not fit for purpose. The lighting, teaching aids, furniture, the number of students in the classroom...it can reach seventy or eighty in a very small classroom. It is against the fundamentals of teaching... We need to improve the teaching facilities, teaching aids, English language labs. All the buildings were built for primary and secondary schools then were changed to university use. Every day we have problems with rooms. There are too many students and they are all looking for their lectures, they block the rooms, and there is confusion as they try and find their teacher. **Khalifa, teaching staff, December 2011**

There was the same situation a year later. Hameed tells of how the teachers and students walk around trying to find an empty room for their lesson. The shortage of classrooms means that it often depends on another teacher being absent as to whether there may be a classroom available.

There is a lack of classrooms in the university. You come and teach your students and there is no classroom so you look around to find if some other teacher is absent. Then you take your students there but it is a nightmare. The teachers and students are changing rooms all the time. So much time is wasted. **Hameed, teaching staff, October 2012**

Hassan is a very experienced teacher and has taught across all ages from primary to university level. He sees the facilities below standard through all the educational standards, and yet this is against a background where, as mentioned in the previous chapter, 38.2% of the Libyan national budget was spent on education in 1998 (Bacsich, 2012).

The issues start with the buildings themselves, the classrooms. It's not just at university level, it's across all. None of the classrooms is suitable for teaching. **Hassan, teaching staff, October 2012**

Ali gives more details about the condition of the classrooms which have no doors, windows or light. They are not fit for purpose. Additionally the numbers being taught in these rooms leads to chaos, with teachers struggling to take attendance registers and then to try and keep discipline.

Our classrooms are a disaster. There are too many students, too much congestion. The numbers can reach fifty or sixty in a class in the English department, which is too much for teaching languages. Teachers can't control this number. Teaching time can be wasted because of these numbers, like finding out who is attending and keeping discipline. Our classrooms do not have doors, windows, light. **Ali, Head of Education, October 2012**

There is also a lack of other facilities in the university, often the most basic ones. Hameed suggests that both teachers and students find it difficult to be committed to their lessons when the premises lack sufficient toilet facilities.

My friend told me this university has two thousand students and only has five toilets. This is one reason why we do not seem to be committed. We have to go to the mosque outside the campus but this cuts back on our teaching time. But what about the ladies? What can they do? **Hameed, teaching staff, October 2012**

This is of concern given that the number of females entering Higher Education in 2007/2008 was almost double that of males (figure 20). There is little provision for the comfort and well-being of female students.

University	Number of students		
	Female	Male	Total
Al-Fatah	19688	10552	30240
Sebha	10138	4400	14538
Naser	59	19	78
Omer Al-Mukhtar	16509	8809	25318
Al-Mergeb	17791	14931	32722
7 <sup>th</sup> of April	23430	12075	35505
Al-Jabel Algharbi	12168	6220	18388
Al-Asmaria	1754	2173	3927
Total	101537	59179	160716

**Figure 20** Students registered in Libyan universities 2007-2008

*Source: Secretariat of Higher Education cited in Tarhoni, 2010*

Under the Gaddafi regime Libyan women were encouraged to progress and this is reflected in the numbers taking advantage of higher education. Deeb and Deeb (1982: 72) assert that “the most significant development in the emancipation of Libyan women has been the area of education, and there is little doubt that the major impetus behind the education of women has come from the government.” Figure 21 shows the remarkable increase in women taking up higher education opportunities between 1970 and 2001.

Academic year	Total joined	Females	Percentage of females
1969/1970	3663	410	11.2
1984/1985	32770	11142	34.0
1994/1995	134412	67874	50.5
2000/2001	276744	142523	51.5

**Figure 21** Libyan women in Higher Education 1970 – 2001

*Source: Obeidi, 2001*

There have been mixed classes in almost all educational institutions since 2000. The teaching staff are also mixed, with a substantial number of women now occupying positions of responsibility. “I am now Head of Department” – Khalifa, December 2011. It is therefore surprising that so little attention has been paid to basic facilities to accommodate women students and teachers while they are on university premises. Cultural values dictate that women, despite the access to education, do not have the same freedoms as men to go off campus.

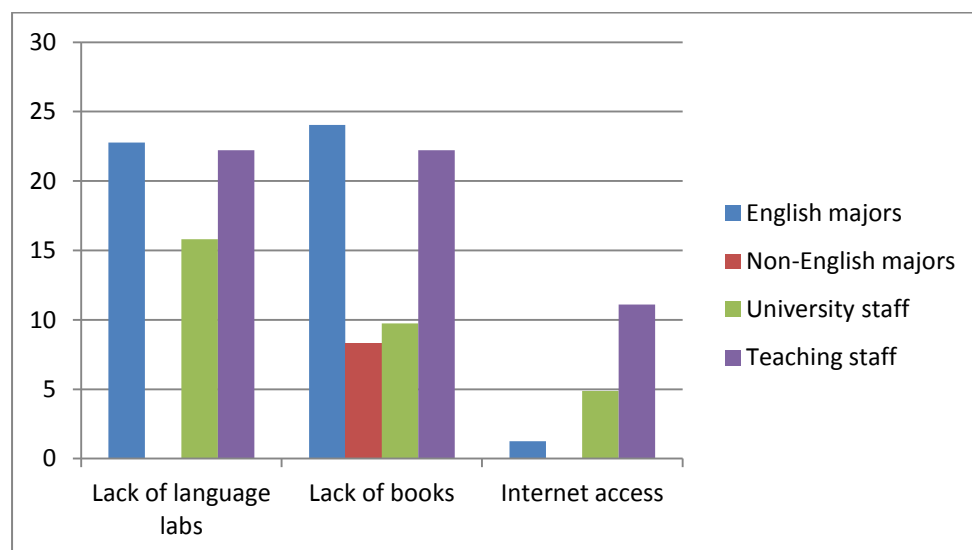
The severe shortage of teaching rooms is a source of frustration for teachers and students. Overcrowded classrooms without doors, windows or light highlight the difficult conditions under which the university teachers are working. Combined with a lack of resources, the poor facilities compound the issues related to the teaching and learning which is taking place in the universities.

### **6.3 Resources**

The focus group of mixed teaching staff and students in February 2011 argued that a lack of language labs made it extremely difficult for them to have any access to English, especially as they were not able to mix with native speakers. They were also vocal in their criticism of the lack of other resources such as a library or access to the internet.

Some teachers just give a topic and then tell students to research this themselves. But how can we do this? It's impossible. There are no books available, we cannot find out about these things, we have no internet available at the university. **Focus group, February 2011**

In the survey carried out in February 2011 there were similar complaints about the lack of books and language labs (figure 22). The English majors felt particularly aggrieved at not having access to books and language labs where they could practise all their skills. This was also in agreement with the English language teaching staff. In contrast, the non-English majors did not feel language labs were important for them, although they did acknowledge the lack of books available to them, though not to the same extent as the English majors and teachers. As previously stated 42% of the English non-majors had criticised the lack of English language centres in Libyan cities, therefore they were prepared to use resources outside the university in order to improve their language skills. The teachers were more in favour of having internet access but this was not a priority for the students. This may be because they had not yet recognised the potential for English language learning through the internet. The university staff acknowledged the lack of language labs and, to a lesser extent, the lack of books and internet access.



**Figure 22** Lack of resources February 2011

There is no reason why there should be such approval for language labs as not all language experts are convinced of their usefulness; some believe that language labs focus on the acquisition of linguistic accuracy rather than communicative fluency (Garcia & Wolff, 2001). Huang and Liu (2000) found that a communicative approach was not as successful as they

had anticipated when in a language lab setting as opposed to a classroom. Although the lack of language labs may be of primary concern to the teachers and English language students in Libyan universities, Milton (2002) found that language laboratories:

proved to be a useful tool, but only one tool, in the hands of a good teacher, and a huge waste of time and money in the hands of a bad teacher. There really is no evidence to suggest the use of language laboratories improved the efficiency of language learning overall. (Milton, 2002: 16).

It may be that language labs have been seen as the only resource for language teaching in universities, given the lack of books and access to native speakers. The loss of these labs has therefore been seen as a major deprivation.

Changes reflected in the teaching environment indicate the awareness of the importance of technology at an earlier age and some of the teachers, like Aisha, view computers as an extension of the traditional language classroom, where memorising is the preferred methodology. This may be counter-productive in that younger children may be left to work on their own and the supportive learning environment that they need for developing their language skills (Roskos, Tabors & Lenhart, 2009: 5) may not be available to them. However, in Korea, where children are exposed to English from an early age, Kang and Lee (2011) find that multi-sensory approaches enable children to interact with one another and this helps them to use the language and maintain their interest in learning English.

We should start learning English at six to eight years old when minds are free to roam, when we have the ability to memorise. If I were that age, I would prefer to learn on a computer and have the chance to learn two skills at the same time, the computer and English. **Aisha, teaching staff, October 2012**

Ahmed argues in December 2011 that the resources are not available or, if they are, then they are out of date and not suited to modern teaching. He suggests that teachers are left to their own devices and must find their own materials, which is not always the right course of action to benefit the students.

The other teaching aids, audio visual and other teaching aids that are needed when teaching a foreign language, again these aids do not exist at all, or at least if they are available, they are of very little use. The textbooks and the materials that we use to teach a foreign language are not really up to date. Sometimes good materials are not available at all and it's



left to the teacher's opinions, and the way they believe that teaching can be done, which again is something that doesn't help. **Ahmed, teaching staff, December 2011**

Although English language textbooks were issued to the secondary schools and there was much investment in these so that they followed the communicative methods, the universities have not had such resources allocated to them. This is partly because of the Libyan system. Curricula for schools are arranged by the Committee of Higher Education, while at university level the syllabus for each course is arranged by the individual (Gadour, 2006: 173-175). In December 2011 Ahmed has hope that change is on its way, although he does recognise that improvements take time: *"it's an accumulative problem that accumulated over a long period of time, and solving it or dealing with it cannot be dealt with overnight."*

Hopefully in our case or in our situation in Libya, I think we do expect that things will improve now because we have always been complaining about the bad situation, of the lack of all the teaching aids, and I guess we will in the future, in the near future, we will pay attention to this and possibly things will improve. The classroom should be well-equipped. **Ahmed, teaching staff, December 2011**

There is a severe lack of teaching resources available in a Libyan university, as described by Hassan, the Head of Registration in the Faculty of Education. Khalifa supports what he is saying and shows how there are only ten English books in the library, yet five hundred and forty English language students. The lack of books highlighted in the survey in February 2011 is a serious issue, especially for the teachers and the English major students. There is not even access to a digital library to alleviate this problem.

The memorising method that most of the teachers in the faculty are using is old-fashioned. They bring a notebook and start reading from this book. There are no activities at all in the classroom. The numbers of students are so high, the learning outcomes are very poor. There is a lack of teaching aids and facilities, no projectors, no Smartboards, nothing. Every student should have a personal computer and a personal email address so people can research and do their homework online. There is no internet in Libya, we don't have the technology. The teachers should improve themselves, they should know about computers and technology. **Hassan, head of registration, December 2011**

Teaching aids are non-existent, there is no lab, the biggest problem we have is not having an English lab to practise English. There are no projectors, teachers still use the old chalk board, which is a big disadvantage. In this department they have five hundred and forty

students. We don't have enough books in the library, we need more. We have just ten English books in the whole library. Now we need to have a digital library so people can work anywhere on the internet. **Khalifa, teaching staff, December 2011**

Teachers are conscious of the impact the lack of teaching aids has on them and their students but Yasser says "some colleges have a language lab but these are not used, perhaps just once a year" (teaching staff, December, 2011). Even when the labs do exist, Hameed argues that the computers and software are not up to date. With the pace of technology in the modern world, this makes them obsolete. The other concern is that there are never enough computers, even the old ones, to accommodate all the students in a class.

There are no English labs in the high schools, nor in most of the universities. If they do exist, the computers and the software are out of date or not working. There is a lack of use of modern technology. There are no audio recorders in the department. This is happening across all of Libya. Sometimes there is a language lab with twenty five old computers and there are forty students. Do you divide the class into two groups? What happens to the others? It is just wasting time again. **Hameed, teaching staff, October 2012**

Ali agrees. His students can access a language lab but the computers are old and broken, and even then the students only get to use the lab once per month. It is a source of frustration as the teachers know that students need more than this. The teachers who are forced to provide their own laptops as a teaching aid find that there are no electric sockets in the classrooms, and so they cannot recharge their batteries.

We have English labs but they have old machines, old computers, which are not working. There are too many students. We know they should be practising their skills but because of these problems, we have a real issue with this. They should be there every day but the only chance they have of using the lab is once per month. We don't have enough technology or teaching aids. We should have modern teaching aids like projectors, computers. Teachers should have laptops. There are no electric sockets for the teachers who bring their own laptops. The blackboard is old. **Ali, Head of Education, October 2012**

Milton (2002) describes computer language labs as "*something of an oddity...[with] no clear method or best practice for using them*" (2002: 17). Stutzman (2007 :7) suggests that the usefulness of language labs depends entirely on the way the teacher uses it. Recent research suggests that the potential for language learning through the medium of mobile devices such as phones and media players is likely to be greater due to the widespread

usage of such devices, especially by young people (Kukulska-Hulme, 2006). Power and Shetha (2010) describe how Bangladeshi English language teachers are using media players, or iPods, to develop their own English language skills.

The digital language lab is the successor to the more old-fashioned language lab. This is more a multi-media classroom, where all students have a networked computer and can access online sites, although all is monitored by the teacher. The concern with using digital language labs is that they are dependent on the materials developed for them (Bibbee, Smidt & Lazar, 2012:82). They are also more likely to reduce social interaction (Bibbee et al, 2012 :83) and therefore diminish their value for enhancing oral language skills.

Aisha suggests that the reason for keeping to traditional methods of teaching may be because there is no way of involving the students in the classes as they have no resources.

We don't have labs, the students can only memorise in the classroom. They do not participate and they are so negative. But there are no activities, no presentations in the classroom. The most important thing is the English language and being able to practise. We need an internet connection, a library, movies, online activities. The teacher should be an adviser, a guide at university level and the students should be the main participants. **Aisha, teaching staff, October 2012**

Hameed describes other basic resources which are not available. Photocopiers are non-existent. This raises another issue regarding the integrity of the exam system.

We don't have photocopiers in the university and teachers have to print exam papers in a private shop. We need our own photocopiers. In the private shops the teachers look for the cheapest option as they are spending their own money. You cannot trust the confidentiality of the shop. Papers can be sold on to students who want good marks. It will come back as if the university is cheating. Our own reputation can be lost. I myself have an old copier and I stay up all night and come to university with black hands just so I can be sure nobody sees the exam papers in advance. All stages of education have the same problem. Exam papers are not kept confidential. **Hameed, teaching staff, October 2012.**

The teachers are responsible for their own teaching materials and also for providing the exam papers. The results of these exams dictate the futures of the students and yet Hameed is showing that it is a system which is open to abuse. A lack of basic resources impacts the teacher's ability to carry out a professional role and indicates that it may be a gradual change to introduce these resources, given that many teachers will require training before they can utilise most modern resources.

The teaching aids that can help to motivate students are ones which can be utilised effectively to provide both enjoyment and education. Power and Shrestha (2010) describe how, despite large investments made by government, the level of English competence among Bangladeshi students and teachers is often low, and they attributed this to the nature of language learning activity in the classroom. One of the suggestions was to investigate mobile technology for language learning. They found that the advantages of using mobile technology outweighed that of traditional desktop computers as it meant less dependence on the infrastructure of the learning site (Power et al, 2010). Ownership of mobile phones is ubiquitous and it is a solution that has not yet been identified by the Libyan teachers, yet using such technology could prove to be a strong motivating factor in the learning of English. Mobiles were used to deliver audio materials to students and both audio and video materials to teachers for their professional development in a Bangladeshi initiative and there were distinct changes in classroom practice as a result; teachers and students were talking more in English (Shaheen & Lace, 2013). Simple solutions which have worked in other developing countries may also prove effective in Libya.

#### **6.4 Human Resources**

Apart from the material resources, the human resources also have an impact on teaching English in Libyan universities. Libya has suffered from a lack of English teachers at university level due to a mix of factors: the English language teachers were forced to take up other careers when the teaching of English was banned in Libya; many of the English language staff took up opportunities to study for PhDs abroad; the emergence of English has been seen as a way of gaining employment, therefore studying the language has increased in popularity for students; overall there has been a huge increase in the number of higher education students across the whole of the Arab world. Under the former regime great attention was paid to education and 38.2% of the Libyan national budget in 1998 was allocated to education (Bacsich, 2012), resulting in larger numbers of students but not necessarily the teaching staff to accommodate them. Much of this lack of human resources resulted from the low status of teachers in Libya; not only were they not given professional regard, but they were also poorly paid. It was therefore common for teachers to take on

secondary jobs in order to earn enough money to support themselves. Teaching was not seen as a good job, especially for men. This also resulted in a large number of women taking up teaching positions, but a shortage was then created when they married and stopped teaching in order to raise families.

The foreign staff, who were welcomed into Libya to teach English, were not from English speaking countries during the Gaddafi regime. University staff came mainly from Iraq and India, and by the end of 2012 some of these teachers were coming back to Libya after fleeing the country during the revolution. There are also some Americans teaching English in the private academies, working alongside Libyan staff. However, the foreign staff at university have been criticised for their accents, particularly the Indian teachers. Hameed argues that he cannot understand his Indian colleagues.

The Indian staff accents cannot be understood. I myself cannot understand them, so how can the students understand? The Libyan staff are better at teaching English, their accent is clear, their pronunciation is clear. The Iraqis are also good, the Arab people are better than the Indians. **Hameed, teaching staff, October 2012**

From the perspective of university management, the Indian teachers are good members of staff, but Hassan reflects that they do not encourage their students to work. He finds this a negative aspect of them and this is also evidence of the cultural barriers between the Indian teachers and the Libyans. In Libyan tradition it is expected that the students are given assignments to work on outside the classroom, but the Indian staff are reluctant to set extra work for their students.

The foreign teachers, the Indians, are very quiet, very polite. They come on time, they leave on time. But the foreign staff don't encourage the students to participate in activities. They don't ask them to do assignments or reports. This is a very negative aspect of them. **Hassan, head of registration, December 2011**

Soad would prefer to have Libyan teachers teaching English, citing the fact that Libyans have a better rapport with their fellow countrymen. As was seen earlier in this chapter, the focus group in February 2011 complained that their teachers did not understand them or take a personal interest in them, although they did not specify the nationality of their teachers. When asked about the challenges of learning English, there was comment from the English majors in February 2011 that "the Indian teachers are not good at pronunciation." However,

Soad also suggests that English native speakers are needed at university for accent and pronunciation of English.

We have lots of different teacher nationalities for teaching English. In schools they are Libyan. At university they are Libyan, Iraqi and Indian. At the academies they are Libyan and American. I prefer Libyan or native English speakers. I believe there are great Libyan teachers and the advantage is that Libyans can connect, they understand you as a Libyan, how the brain works. The misconceptions that Libyans follow can only be understood by Libyans, but the accent and pronunciation should come from English native speakers. **Soad, October 2012**

Miriam, one of the departmental staff, says: “At primary school they have Libyan teachers but at university they have Indian teachers. Libyans are better, they understand Libyan students and what they need from the educational side.” (October 2012). Ali explains that misunderstandings arise when the foreign staff cannot speak Arabic, therefore they cannot communicate properly with their students. This is of course impacted by the low level of English of the university students. He describes the difficulties encountered when all the foreign English language teaching staff left the country and the university was so desperate for teachers that they employed anyone who could teach, even resorting to those who were not proficient in English. However, he argues that the Libyans were still superior to having foreign staff in teaching positions.

The foreign staff from India are not very well qualified. This is affecting our students and English language methods. They only speak English, they do not understand Arabic so there are misunderstandings between the staff and students. There was no teaching staff last year until the English department was about to die – all the foreign staff left the country and all the Libyan staff are on scholarship programmes. We could not even find people with High Diplomas to teach our students. It was so difficult last year, we tried everywhere. We would employ anyone to teach, even part-time. We were so late doing exams. It had such an impact on our students, only three months for the whole academic year. We employed people whose main subject was not English, just that they could teach. The Libyan teachers are better if they are well prepared and we should only have foreign staff if we don't have the Libyan staff. **Ali, Head of Faculty of Education, October 2012**

Although there may have been perceptions that the foreign staff were not well qualified, it seems that some of the Libyan staff may have been less well qualified. One Head of

Department spoke of interviewing a Libyan for the position of an English teacher at the university:

She found it too difficult to carry out the interview in English as she found it hard to use the language. **Focus group, November 2011**

There is recognition from the teaching staff that having at least one native English speaker on the staff would be advantageous. Ahmed expressed this hope in February 2011 and again later in the year that schools as well as universities needed a native speaker to help correct pronunciation.

I think it is important for our students to have the advantage of having at least one native speaker of English as a teacher, a faculty member of English, which would give them the chance to listen to the accurate and correct accent and then proper pronunciation which will obviously always be an advantage to have. This is something we don't have in most of the departments and the lower levels of education. **Ahmed, teaching staff, February 2011**

Ahmed sees the importance of native English speakers being available in both schools and universities and by the end of 2011 he is not afraid to put his viewpoint across; he believes that Libya has missed out in the past on opportunities to introduce English native speakers into the educational system. In his opinion the students can never perfect their English language without the guidance of a native speaker.

Another point which I think is really important and in the past wasn't of concern to anyone here, is having native speaker teachers. This is very advantageous, this is a very big advantage in teaching a foreign language as we know. Students should have the opportunity to listen and speak to a native speaker of the language. I mean not all the teachers should specifically be native speakers, that's not practicably possible, but at least one native speaker teacher should be available in schools as well as university level because this obviously gives students a chance, the opportunity to listen to native speakers. The pronunciation and the phonetics, pronunciation in particular, is important; no matter how well qualified our teachers may be, it is usually very difficult for them to pronounce or speak the language as fluently as native speakers. **Ahmed, teaching staff, December 2011**

Farah also suggested that English native speakers would be better as the Libyan teachers were simply not good enough, and they tended to speak Arabic instead of focusing on English.

Teachers are not well trained, not prepared to teach. There are Libyan teachers in the schools. I would prefer native English teachers, we don't have any good Libyan teachers:

their accent is not good and they speak Arabic. **Farah, university teaching staff, October 2012**

Aisha does not agree that there should be native speakers in the schools but she does feel that the Libyan teachers need training. However, as was seen in the report from the GPCE (2012), the opportunities for English language training are few and the main emphasis has been on computer training for teachers.

Our Libyan English teachers need more training. We all had Libyan teachers in school and we prefer Libyan teachers at that level. It is necessary to have English native speakers at university level, but not in schools. **Aisha, teaching staff, October 2012**

It seems that the accents of the Indian English language teachers make it difficult for the Libyan teachers and students to understand them. There is a breakdown in communication. However, Khalifa suggests that the foreign teachers are not qualified. She casts dispersions on the validity of their Master's degree qualifications, and implies that some of these qualifications may not be genuine. Her anger is directed at the Iraqi teachers, whom she believes treat the Libyan students badly. In the aftermath of the civil war and the departure of the foreign staff, Khalifa has been promoted to Head of Department and she vows not to recruit any more foreign staff.

The problem is having these foreign teachers. All the experience is coming from India, the Philippines and other nationalities. The main problem is the strong accent they have, especially teachers from India. It's not clear at all. The students cannot understand them. Even we find it difficult to communicate with them. This is a big problem, I do not know who is responsible. People who recruit abroad, why do they sign these contracts and bring back teachers who are not qualified? This is not only in the English language department but in all other departments in the university. Most of them are master's degree holders and come from private universities and their qualifications have not been properly checked. Because of these bad staff, our students are suffering. The worst are Iraqi. Empty people. I am so sorry to say that. They look at the Libyan students as being inferior. They believe that Libyan students cannot improve, they cannot achieve anything, they are lazy. And the way they deal with our Libyan students is very bad and I don't know who is responsible for this. Now after the change in the political system the staff are all Libyan, all the foreigners have gone and we hope to get more Libyans soon as we don't have enough staff. I am now Head of Department and I am not going to have any foreign staff in my department. **Khalifa, December 2011**



There is still reason to be cautious about recruiting Libyan teachers, however, as Hammed comments. This suggests that the short-term prognosis for Libyan teachers to be replacing the foreign staff, as Khalifa plans, may not be as successful as she believes it will be.

There are no good teachers to deliver the programmes as their level of English is too low. Some teachers graduated from the Higher Institute of Teachers, most have not been well prepared and are weak in knowledge. Their English language skills are poor. They cannot read or write in English and are unable to correct students' mistakes. **Hameed, teaching staff October 2012**

Whether foreign or Libyan teaching staff, it is agreed that the relationship between teacher and student should be one where students are encouraged to use English language skills. One student in the focus group in February 2011 told of why some students did not want to practise their English in class: "If you say something wrong, the teacher laughs". Improving the participation of students in foreign language classes, and making them more communicative and interactive, may not be forthcoming unless attitudes can be changed. The fourth year students described their experience in a French class, where they had the opportunity to practise the language in the classroom. Although this concerned a French language teacher, it could also have been an English language teacher. The teacher used French during the lesson and all the students asked to be moved from that class. It was considered that three or four years of learning a language at university level was not enough to be able to understand French.

We had a French teacher teaching French language to the fourth years and they all came and asked to be changed from that class because they spoke French all the time. **Teaching staff, Focus group, February 2011**

The fourth year students are the ones graduating and about to become French teachers in the secondary schools. After four years of French at university, many of these students cannot communicate in French.

Don't blame the students as they only start learning French in the first year. How can they understand French by the fourth year? **Student, Focus group, February 2011**

It was suggested that the foreign staff may be responsible for the poor teaching standards at the university and there were a number of comments made about Indian teachers' pronunciation. Once the foreign staff had left, and Libyans stepped in to cover the vacancies, there were suggestions that English native speakers should be available at

university level for students to practise their communication skills. This has to be placed in the context of the French native speaker teacher whose French language students asked to be moved from the class because the teacher spoke in French. An English native speaker may also find that all the students move class if English is spoken in the classroom.

## **6.5 Learning Culture**

Some of the concerns about the human resources also relate to the learning culture in which they are embedded. In Libyan culture it is regarded as shameful if a teacher refuses or is unable to teach any courses given by the department (Hamed, 2005: 55). This can lead to teachers teaching areas outside their own expertise, but there is a general belief that all university teachers are able to teach all courses (Elabbar, 2011). It is therefore sometimes easier to focus on the lack of resources as an explanation for poor learning outcomes.

This learning environment also has an impact on the motivation of both teachers and students. Yasser expresses concern that students are not at university to master the English language, rather to pass an exam or gain a certificate. Yasser believes that his students need incentives, which could be teaching aids to make the learning more interesting.

Motivation needs incentives. Sometimes our students come to university only to pass an exam and this is not an effective learning environment. Teaching aids are not available, they should make these available. There are a lot of barriers. **Yasser, teaching staff, December, 2011**

The focus group in February 2011 suggests that students come to the English department to get a job, and then prefer to go to classes where they can sit passively as the teacher uses traditional teacher-centred methods. They argue that students do not want to be involved, and that they may end up with a certificate but they have no matching skills, as they are not well qualified.

We only get a certificate, we do not learn the right things. We only learn to pass an exam. Most students come to university without any desire to learn a language. The most important thing is for students to pass exams, not to learn a subject. Lots of students change from group to group because some teachers give good marks. Students run away from modern methods, they go to classes they can pass with no hard work, where they have traditional methods. The students pass exams but they are not well qualified. **Focus group, February 2011**

The focus group implies that the pressure to pass exams places a burden on the teachers as some are prepared to give good marks despite the students not doing much work; the group suggests there is a perception that all students will pass and they agree that “100% pass is not good for the system”. Naguib (2006:73) argues that an exam-driven culture can result in teachers and administrators being put under pressure to pass students who might otherwise fail. This is to ensure that students pass from one grade to another, but it results in students progressing to the next stage of education without understanding and knowledge. Naguib (2006:73) suggests that there is consequently no incentive for students to work hard to achieve their goals, nor for teachers to teach well, but he says such a system is deeply embedded in Egyptian culture and is accepted. However, there is recognition from the teachers that improving the Libyan system will bring about a change in the motivation levels of the students, as Ali suggests.

Now we should improve our education system. It's not like when Gaddafi asked us to get five hundred qualified without looking at quality. We should prepare people to have the right knowledge so we can build our new state. Previous politics focused on short-term. We should have long-term aims. Now when we have had our revolution, we should look to develop our students properly. How can we improve? We should look after the English language teachers, train them, provide teaching aids and proper classrooms. If students have good teachers, aids, classrooms, they will be good students. **Ali, Head of Education, October 2012**

Ali is satisfied that the Libyan students will respond to improvement. A positive learning environment is one where teachers and students have a sense of comfort and belonging within a classroom; *“the physical arrangements of the classroom environment can promote or hinder teaching, learning or the development of a sense of community”* (Unesco, 2004). It is therefore important that the classroom environment is pleasing so that it provides a good foundation for educational and learning activities to take place, and it also becomes a learning space where people want to be.

It may be more difficult to change a mindset where politics played such a role in achievement. Khalifa was interviewed at the end of 2011, when Libya was entering the transitional period after Gaddafi:

Now we are discovering from previous years that some of the results from certain students have been changed by management. This was individual people who controlled everything in the faculty, they could change results, they could change everything. For example, the

head of the English department can change results so that the people they want to pass can pass but the ones they do not want to pass will never pass. Some students did not attend any lectures, they came only to the final exam and they passed. **Khalifa, teaching staff, December 2011**

Khalifa is very positive about the new government and says: “This is not going to happen any more” but it may still take some time for such practices to be forgotten. The students themselves may need to perceive education and achievement in a different way, before real changes in the system can be implemented. There is recognition that Libyan students need to be motivated to learn a language, and this is seen as an issue, given the challenges that lie ahead. It is also recognised that improvements need to be made.

But to improve, you need motivation, students need to be motivated. Students should be able to learn by themselves and work hard. **Farah, university teaching staff, October 2012**

Farah is concerned at the lack of motivation and self-determination on the part of the students. Despite these reservations that Farah has about student motivation, and Youssef’s (2012) previous assertion that one of the main challenges to learning English was low motivation, the high school students in Youssef’s (2012) study showed a moderate interest in the introduction and learning of English in school, and this indicates that there may be a change in how young people view the value of English. Soad believes that students see English only as a means to employment, although he has hopes that the influence of Western culture will begin to take effect.

The students do not have a strong foundation, they think their English is there, they’ll get a job after they graduate, but their grammar is bad, their writing is bad, and they have a problem where they translate everything into English. Another problem is that they do not have the cultural background of the language so they cannot understand metaphors or slang. I think this has been neglected. Now they are starting to watch lots of movies, songs and music so they are starting to get over it now. **Soad, university teaching staff, October 2012**

Soad also shows recognition that Libya is now connecting more with the global community, and that the preparation for learning English at university may improve due to Libyan access to an English-speaking media influence. Vavrus (2002: 373) suggests that English is seen as a means of connecting to the wider world and also providing access to better jobs, and Soad’s comments at the end of 2012, after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, imply both of

these incentives may be starting to take effect in the new Libya. English language education is seen as providing skills which allow individuals to engage with a global society (Seargeant & Erling, 2011). It is also interesting to note that English has also been seen as a link language in communities which have been divided by conflict (Kennett, 2011). Where international organisations have been called upon to restore and develop services in conflict areas, English has been used as a means of communication, but internationally English links the country to the outside world (Kennet, 2011).

During the transitional stage when Libya was in the middle of changing regimes, the teachers made it clear that the standard of the students entering university was well below their expectations; comments from the university teachers included: “students are very weak and they don’t have a good background in English language”; “they were not prepared well enough”; “they only know the basics”; “they expect teachers to translate all the time”; “not adequate”; “they are missing the important tools”. However, Khalifa suggests that some of the students in 2011 had already had exposure to English speaking countries. In the latter years of the Gaddafi regime there were already signs that Libya was becoming more engaged with international communities, especially the English speaking ones. The scholarship programme which encouraged university teachers to go abroad to gain their Master’s and PhDs also resulted in the children of those teachers being exposed to English language during their sojourn in the English-speaking country.

Students are not very good. When they come in the first year, they are not very well prepared. This is at the previous education stage, they were not prepared for university. There are only a few exceptions, somebody who has studied English language abroad or somebody who has been learning by themselves. **Khalifa, teaching staff, December 2011**

This indicates that there are changes taking place within Libya. Some students are making the most of their opportunities to travel outside Libya, usually with family, where they are using the English language. Previously this would not have been possible as there were so few opportunities to travel. With more young people travelling to English speaking countries and staying there for up to four years, it may well follow that the level of English language skills will be raised for those entering the university system in Libya. The British Council anticipates 17,000 Libyans will take up scholarships to the UK in 2013 (Custer, 2013b), and many of these will bring families with them.

The other significant factor about Khalifa's reflection is that some students may be learning English independently. The concept of 'independent learning' implies that learners can take responsibility for their own learning (Rogers, 1969: 9). This suggests that there are now young Libyans who are engaging in the activity of learning English because they find it interesting (Asker, 2011). It indicates that Farrah's concerns stated above regarding self-determination may not be justified. There may well be students who want to learn, and who are intrinsically motivated; it may also be possible that the teachers are not yet ready to recognise that their own roles are also changing in the Libya that is evolving. Teachers may need to become facilitators as students make decisions about their own learning.

## **6.6 Summary and Conclusion**

The state of the material environment in Libya in February 2011 was summarised by the focus group of teachers and students: *"We have a lack of everything, no labs, no facilities, no resources, no curriculum, and old-fashioned methodology"*. This reflected the frustration they felt with their existing education system, which they believed had been neglected.

The large class sizes and inadequate facilities were mentioned on many occasions by teachers whereas the students focused on the lack of relationship they had with their teachers (Figure 18). Interest in a subject can be developed by building better relationships between teachers and students, therefore it is important for language learning that students have a good relationship with their teacher. The English majors in particular feel strongly that their teachers are not very good. This may well relate to the size of the classes, as it is difficult to build relationships in large classes. It is especially of concern in a foreign language environment, where the focus should be on interaction and communicative approaches. Teachers complain of classes of up to eighty students in a small classroom. With such large classes it becomes almost impossible to deliver interactive lessons, and this may partly explain why the teachers tend to adopt a teacher-centred style of teaching. They do not have the opportunity of supporting students in a way that would build relationships. Teachers may not be able to pay attention and give feedback to individual students in large classes where there is a lack of physical space. It has been shown

that frequent and specific feedback makes students feel they are being properly supported (Chen et al, 2010), and consequently this leads to learning becoming more enjoyable.

There are complaints about the lack of resources available in the universities, although there does appear to be a fixation on the concept of language labs. It is unlikely that the teachers will utilise these if available, as they may not have the skills required. Where language labs are functional, they are not being used. However, interest in the English language classroom can be developed through quite simple approaches such as encouraging the use of spoken English, as this is one area which all students, as well as university teaching staff, agree is lacking. Access to computers and the internet may also help when material resources are not available; although textbooks are available in schools, they have not been provided in the universities, and teachers such as Khalifa indicate the university libraries also suffer from a lack of books. This impacts on the ability to carry out research.

The human resources or teaching staff are often foreign nationals and this tends to create some tension within an insular society such as Libya. Although the focus may be on the foreign staff and their perceived deficiencies, the universities had no choice if they wanted staff. With the foreigners leaving Libya during the revolution, it left a huge deficit in staffing the English language departments, and many struggled to find competent teachers. Although the suggestion of having a native English speaker available was mentioned, the overall feeling was that Libyan teachers should be properly trained for the positions in the universities.

It is still uncertain what impact the influence of exposure to English speaking countries will have as this is a more recent phenomenon in Libya's history. The young people who have been living in English speaking countries are returning to Libya with a higher skillset in the English language when they enter university. This may influence the culture of learning in Libya and raise standards. There is also a change being evidenced by some teachers who note that some students are taking individual responsibility for their own English language learning. Nevertheless, Elabbar (2011) concludes in his study on Libyan education that poor facilities and resources within the universities do have an impact on the teaching and learning processes. Libya may need to focus on improving these facilities and resources, but it seems that the learning culture may be slowly evolving.

The next chapter explores the challenges of teaching of English in Libyan Higher Education.



## **Chapter 7 Challenges of Teaching English in Libya**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the issues faced by teachers in Higher Education in Libya. The reality of teaching English language at university level is investigated. Between February 2011 and November 2012 thirteen individual interviews were carried out with Libyan university staff, against a background of a changing political climate. In February 2011 thirty one university staff members across four campuses were surveyed and a focus group interview was carried out, followed up by a further focus group interview in November 2011.

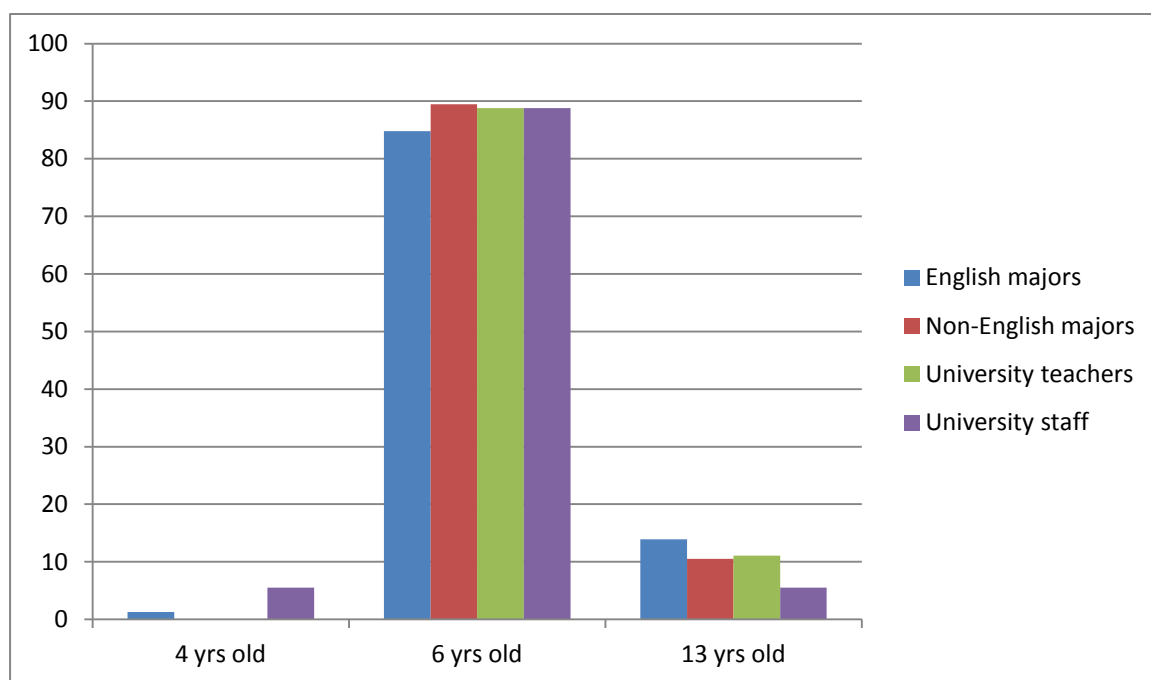
The age when students start learning a language may have an impact on their level of English when they reach university; however, the quality of what and how they are being taught in school also has an impact on their level and their motivation. This chapter investigates how well prepared students are when they arrive at university, and then explores teaching in the high schools which link to university. Additionally the chapter investigates the challenges faced by the university teaching staff and explores teaching in the universities. The chapter also investigates the issues faced by a lack of qualified Libyan teachers and considers the suggestions made by university staff and students on how to improve the teaching of English in Libyan Higher Education.

### **7.2 When and How to Start Learning English**

English is taught in Libyan schools from year 5, which means that most children are aged about eleven years old when they start learning the language. This was a conscious decision by the former regime in recognition of the need to start developing the quality of English language and learning; prior to this English language classes had started at year 7, which was around 13 years old. Figure 23 shows the attitudes of university staff and students, who strongly advocate a much earlier start to learning English. Overall, eighty eight per cent of all those surveyed believed that six years old would be the best time to start introducing English classes in schools. In the focus group of fourth year students in February 2011, it was agreed that “it is better to start early so we grow up with the language”.

Ahmed, from the English department, believes that by starting early, students will reach a much better level of English by the time they arrive at university.

I think it's a very well-known linguistic fact, the earlier the better, so if for example they start learning English at elementary or primary school, then they will be well prepared when they reach the Higher Education Institutes and that will obviously help us as teachers to deliver, to further develop their skills and linguistic abilities. I would say that concentrating on younger learners, they have the aptitude, I mean it is more possible for them to learn a foreign language so that when they reach university level, they will be at a good proficiency level. **Ahmed, teaching staff, February 2011**



**Figure 23** Time to start learning English February 2011

In November 2011 a focus group of teachers suggested that children should start doing presentations in English from an early age so that when they came to university, they would be used to doing that. The English language teachers from the universities who were interviewed in 2012 also recommended an early start. Hameed suggested that:

The right time to learn the English language is from the first year because students can get familiar with both languages from the beginning. They should start with pictures to build vocabulary. At 6 years old we should teach letters and then they can build words for themselves. They can learn the alphabet by singing and activities. **Hameed, teaching staff, October 2012**

Farah, teaching in the English language department, felt that:

they should start learning from seven years old, that's a good time to learn. If I were that age I would like to learn from books and the internet. Definitely the computer.

This is an interesting concept as Stockwell (2012: 3) argues that learners' experiences with technology impact their acceptance of technology for language learning. Young children have not yet the experience of using technology, therefore they will not have any preconceptions regarding its use. This would, however, presuppose that the teachers had the technological capabilities as well as the educational skills to deliver such programmes. As technology changes so rapidly, it would also mean that teachers were being updated regularly and had support available to them when required. Fischer (2012: 17) also argues that computer assisted language learning may not be so effective for the younger age group.

The ages suggested for starting to learn English reflect the Libyan education system. Four years old is the age when children would be entering nursery school, six years old is when they begin their primary school education, and thirteen years old is the time when they commence their preparatory school education. Libyans identify with these age groups, and this is why they have proposed these particular age groups.

It must be emphasised that teaching young children would require a different approach, and it may not be realistic to expect inexperienced teachers to be able to introduce new activities suited to a younger age group. However, it is interesting to note studies carried out in Sweden, where the teaching approach is more traditional; classrooms are arranged with the teacher at the front and are very much teacher-led. These found the use of the target language in classrooms very infrequent and the teachers themselves have had no English in their teacher training (Lundberg, 2007:25). However, findings from the projects underline the importance of teachers and communicative classroom activities for children learning a language from an early age (Lundberg, 2007: 26). When the six and seven year olds learnt English songs, Lundberg (2007:27) reports, they went home and shared these with much younger siblings, often aged three or four. Soad also suggests that such communicative activities would be welcome in Libyan schools and he agrees with Lundberg (2007: 27) that learning at this age should be fun and enjoyable. Miriam agrees and proposes that activities which are natural to children, such as drawing, be used in English language learning.

As young as possible, under five, three is a good time to start learning as the brain is being developed and the child is using the left hemisphere which is more practical

and effective for learning English. They will learn English like a native speaker. At that age a child can learn a language without mixing them, it's scientifically proven. A six year old at school would love the communicative method. Include lots of culture, interesting activities, so they forget they are learning. Just having fun, spontaneous and effective. For adults it's different. **Soad, teaching staff, October 2012**

They should start at four, five, six years old when they are beginning primary school so they learn to like the language, they don't find it strange. At six they can learn by drawing activities. **Miriam, university staff, October 2012**

The focus group of teaching staff and students in February 2011 believed that they did not start learning early enough, that they should start in primary school and then they "would have no problems using the language, like other Arab countries." This may, however, be a misconception as Fareh (2010) found that the majority of EFL teachers in Arab schools had no teaching qualifications and conducted their English language classes mainly in Arabic. Ali concurs that there should be an early start to learning a foreign language, but he cautions that much depends on the quality of the teachers.

The right time to start learning English is from the beginning, from primary school. But we need good teachers first before we start thinking of that. They should start learning English from the first year of primary school. **Ali, Head of Faculty of Education, October 2012**

As Orafi (2008) argues, there is no tradition of interaction in Libyan classrooms and textbooks are regarded as information to be memorised, rather than a tool for communication. Lundberg (2007: 31) also cautions that it is extremely difficult to bring about any change in methodology within an educational culture which has deeply embedded traditions.

There are positive signs that English language teaching is now starting at the age of eleven but the general consensus is that classes should start at the age of six. This, according to the teachers, may help in enabling students to achieve a level of proficiency by the time they enter university.

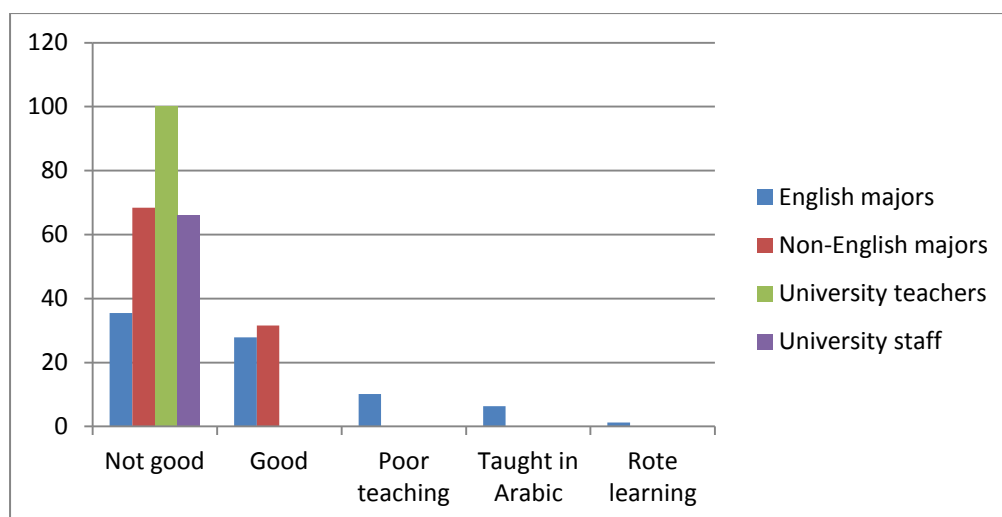
### 7.3 Preparation for Learning

Respondents were asked about how well prepared they felt they or their students were for continuing their English studies at university level. It can be seen that one hundred per cent of the university teachers in February 2011 felt their students were not well prepared (figure 24). A high percentage of both university management and non-English major students also agreed on the lack of preparation. Although twenty-seven per cent of the English majors felt their preparation was good, this was still eclipsed by the thirty-five per cent who believed they were not well prepared for university study. Ahmed was interviewed during the Gaddafi regime, and he highlighted the issues at that stage, that the students arrived at university with such a low level of English the teachers were unable to get them to the required standard of proficiency by the time they graduated.

I think they are not well prepared at all and this is one of the problems we face in Higher Education Institutes in Libya. The students need to reach that level of education, I mean the level when or where they are supposed to be, at intermediate level of proficiency in English, but they are much, much below that level. They are simply not at the linguistic or proficiency level they are supposed to be. We start dealing with them as beginner students which obviously requires more time and more effort and we do not get the results we really want. It is not possible for us to improve them, or raise them to the standard, to the level required. **Ahmed, teaching staff, February 2011**

This continued to be a major issue after the change of regime but the teachers were beginning to think about ways in which the system could be improved. They became more specific about what was needed to get their students better prepared for university study. Hameed suggested a more interactive approach in the secondary schools.

How well are students prepared for university – not at all well prepared in secondary school. There is a lack of language labs, there are no English newspapers in Libya, there are no English language activities in the secondary schools. We should have lots of activities and practical things in the secondary schools to make sure our students are well prepared. **Hameed, teaching staff, October 2012**



**Figure 24** Preparation for learning English at university February 2011

### 7.3.1 Initial assessment

Students enter university with a wide range of English language skills, depending on their motivation, background, teachers and interest. Although the level may be low, there will still be a mixed ability classroom. The university teachers have no indication of students' levels of English before they are placed in classes.

Prepared for studying English at university?– there is no preparation at all. They have a bad background, they are not good at all. They should have a placement test before we accept them. **Farah, teaching staff, October 2012**

The concept of an initial assessment for a university place is unusual in the Libyan educational system, where students expect to be able to progress to higher education automatically. Hassan is head of registration and therefore involved in allocating places, yet in December 2011 he too was already suggesting an interviewing process for those wanting to study English. His concern was that the level of English was so low, so that even when they graduated, students were unable to speak English. They were then being sent out to teach in secondary schools. In the focus group in November 2011 one of the university teachers also admitted that she found it hard to carry out the interview in English as it was difficult for her to use the language.

I have been in this job for twelve years. We should have an interview for the students, especially if they are going to do English language. All the ones coming from secondary school are very weak in English. Some students are very good as

they have studied abroad, their fathers are working abroad. The reasons for the weakness of our students are the teachers in the secondary schools are not good, they are not qualified, they have finished their degrees in Libyan universities and the universities are not good. Sometimes they get a degree in English language but they cannot even speak English. **Hassan, head of registration, December 2011**

Some of the teachers advocated an induction programme before the students were admitted to the English programme at university. Aisha suggested a three month summer course to raise the level of English and Soad proposed an intensive course where students would be encouraged to use English.

We should train students who want to do an English language course before they start a university degree. They should have a three month training session first. Our traditional methods are not preparing students well for university. Their listening skills are missing, these need to be improved. **Aisha, teaching staff, October 2012**

The curriculum at high school is OK, it's good. But it depends on how well prepared the teachers are. Students need more on writing and speaking, more preparation. They suffer from a lack of ability to speak in English. They need conversation and learning to write in an academic way. They should start university with an intensive course for those two skills. How can their skills be improved? Put the students in situations where they can't get through without speaking English, they can't understand without English. Focus on listening, they can improve their speaking by listening. And make it interactive. **Soad, teaching staff, October 2012**

Miriam's concern was not just the level of students' academic ability, but also their immaturity. It was for this reason that she suggested an induction programme of lectures so that students would know what was expected of them at university. The transition from school to university is a defining period for students from all cultures, but Miriam's worry about non-attendance at classes is that students already at a low level of proficiency will not progress beyond that level, and will ultimately not reach their potential.

Basically the students are not good. When they start learning they are not taught well. The teachers cannot translate in the right way, cannot deliver the lessons properly. So when the students come to university, it is a big surprise. In school they have to do what they are told, here they have freedom. But they are not academically ready when they come. Before university starts, they should have two or three lectures. All the students together to show them the environment because

they think that freedom at university means they do not need to attend classes.  
**Miriam, university staff, October 2012**

Sarah is concerned that the lower educational stages in Libyan schools do not prepare the students for English at university and argues that only about six per cent have reached a level suited to university study. Lamb (2011) finds that the cumulative effects of an early advantage in access to the English language can be substantial, and can widen the gap between later achievement rates; small differences in ability and opportunity in the early years can result in major differences in achievement at a later stage (Merton, 1988). Sarah may be right to be concerned that the steps to successful English learning are not being taken.

The students are suffering from a weakness in their grammar, they don't have the ability to build sentences, they have no structure. There's a big problem in the earlier education stage and the level of the students is very weak, the foundations of the language are not there. In the first year when the students start university, they are very weak in the language, therefore we have to teach them very simple vocabulary. When students come to university, they should be proficient in the language. From one hundred and fifty students you will find only ten who are at the right level for university. That is because of the teaching methodology, the teachers and the curriculum. We should be teaching students from primary school and teach them in simple steps until they get to an advanced level. **Sarah, university teaching staff, December 2011**

Shihiba (2011) describes in his research study how the high school students being prepared to join university English departments in Libya attend nineteen classes of forty five minutes per week (GPCE, 2009) and spend most of their time doing grammar, phonetics, reading, writing, listening and lab work. Libyan secondary school teachers are provided with a teacher's book to accompany the new textbooks introduced into the schools (Phillips et al, 2002) but the language and terms used are too difficult and complex for the teachers to understand (Shihiba, 2011). As Sarah comments, the teaching methodology, the teachers and the curriculum are all key problem areas in the early stages.

Saleh's (2002: 29) study found that the most common teaching practice in Libyan English classes were teacher-centred instruction and teacher-led activities. The communicative methods advocated in the textbooks were not being practised and the classroom was teacher dominated (Saleh, 2002: 49). In a later study Orafi and Borg (2009) found that



experienced high school teachers were simply not implementing the changes in the new English curriculum. Ali believes it is because of the political decisions made in earlier years that the English language teachers are not able to cope with the curriculum and methodology.

Students are not well prepared because of the previous stage in high school. Gaddafi is behind it, he stopped English language for about ten years. Even the teachers of English had to teach another subject and then they forgot their English. When they came back, they were very weak, they received no training, and they had very basic skills and knowledge to teach students. **Ali, Head of Faculty of Education, October 2012**

The preparation for English language students starting university is poor, according to both students and university staff. This lack of preparation is mainly attributed to the teaching at earlier educational stages, especially in the high schools.

### **7.3.2 Teachers in High Schools**

To gain more understanding of the earlier stages of education in Libya, where many of the problems associated with poor preparation for university emanate, it is necessary to have some background of the teachers in the high schools. The official statistics from the GPCE report (2008) show that seventy nine per cent of these teachers are female. There are two main routes for teachers finding employment as English teachers in high schools. One is that they are graduates of English departments from Colleges of Teacher Training. There they receive four years of training in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), but this training is carried out mainly through the medium of Arabic. The student teachers have one month's teaching practice in a Libyan high school and then they are regarded as being ready to teach English in a high school.

The second route into teaching is through being a graduate from the English department of a College of Arts. These colleges are for preparing students for further study, not for teaching, and they receive no teaching practice or teaching methodology instruction. Many of their modules are also taught in Arabic.

Graduates from both these university colleges have not developed their English communication skills (Orafi & Borg, 2009; Akle, 2005) and they are the main source of

English language tuition in the high schools. From the mixed focus group of teachers and students in February 2011, there was consensus that “English teachers in schools are a big mistake, they are Arab” and comments that “we should only speak English in the university English department, that is going to improve our English speaking skills”. The fourth year focus group said “in secondary school it was not good, they taught us in the Arabic language. The teachers only do exercises in books, they never do any activities, never talk to us in the classroom”.

These negative reactions from students suggest that the school teachers are entirely at fault for not making the classes more interactive and encouraging the use of English in the classroom. This should, however, be put into perspective against comments from university teachers such as Asma who, later in this chapter, describes how her students were frightened when she tried to introduce interactive practices in her university English classes; the students complained and wanted her to speak Arabic.

They disagree when I use English language in the class. They complain and say they are not used to that. I know we should not be using Arabic in the classroom but when I tried to use only English, everyone in the class, even the excellent students, made very simple mistakes. The second year I explained the grammar in Arabic and then I spoke English in the class and there was a big improvement. **Asma, teaching staff, December 2011**

As Brown (2013) argues, a Libyan teaching other Libyans a foreign language must create an artificial environment and encourage students to participate in the pretence; this may not always be accepted by the learners.

Hameed, a lecturer in English with thirty five years experience of teaching across all educational levels, believed that the poor teaching of English in high schools now is entirely due to political decisions taken earlier when English language teaching was taken off the school curriculum. Because they had no English classes as they went through the Libyan educational system, the graduates expected to teach English have a limited grasp of the language. They are unable to cope with teaching at a higher level than their own competence level. When university staff try and provide training for the high school teachers, they find that these teachers are out of their depth. The level required at secondary school for progression to proficiency at university entrance is far higher than the level the high school teachers can deliver.

Additionally, Hameed suggests that previous political decisions were made that resulted in all university students gaining a degree, whatever their level of competence, and now those students are teaching in the high schools.

Because they stopped teaching English, we had those who finished primary and secondary school without English language. They started university with low skills then they had to teach English. When the government started teaching English, books for primary school were given to secondary schools. It was not the right level for progressing to university. Politics at the time made it easy for students to get degrees and now they are out teaching. The level they are now being asked to teach in secondary schools is higher than the level they have themselves. I've been supervising teachers to teach English and one hundred per cent say they cannot teach at this level, it's too difficult for them. We've been giving training sessions to primary school teachers as well as secondary school teachers and they all complain the level is too high for them. I have done research on this and found out that teachers who graduated before 1996 are much better. The students from 1996 to 2002 are really poor at the English language. This is a big negative effect of political decisions. In 2002 the government started specific secondary school programmes, English language curriculum for those going to teach English at secondary school. Their main subject was English. There are very good students in the system now, they have twenty two classes of English per week in secondary schools but we do not have good teachers to teach them. There are no good teachers to deliver the programmes as their level of English is too low. **Hameed, teaching staff, October 2012**

However, Soad suggests that there are ways to deal with this issue and that good training of teachers may help to overcome it. He acknowledges that the teachers are not well trained, but he also recognises that some teachers have strengths such as communication skills, which can be developed.

The teachers are not very well trained. Sometimes they might be good at English but not at teaching, other times their English is poor but they are great communicators. We should try and meet in the middle with our training of teachers. There's a chance for training them, for speaking include pronunciation and drama. Have listening texts and then conversation. That's a logical order for learning, all start with listening. **Soad, teaching staff, October 2012**

As Sarah discusses later in this chapter, she feels that the materials are available in the secondary schools but the teachers simply do not know how to use the materials properly; they have not been given the required training to make them effective classroom teachers. Can (2010) finds that even small changes in using materials can add variety to teaching and

prevent the classes from being monotonous. Ibrahim (2011) suggests that “the availability of teaching materials in schools increases their usage by teachers” and argues that, if teachers realise the importance of teaching materials, they would have more positive attitudes towards the way they use them.

Ahmed is positive about the textbooks available in the schools and believes that they are fit for purpose; his comments regarding the level of English of the teachers using them was similar to those made by Hameed a year later. However, Ahmed was more circumspect in his criticism than Hameed, which indicates that the teachers are now trying to find solutions to the problem. Hameed, in his comments above, is positive about the calibre of the students in the system in 2012, whereas Ahmed suggested in 2011 that the fault lay with both teachers and students, in that their level of English was inadequate.

The materials, textbooks that are given out in our secondary schools are good, I think, they are well prepared and they are good and modern and they follow the modern teaching methods, the methodology. But the problem is with the level of the teachers, our teachers and students particularly at secondary school level are not up to the level of the textbooks given to them. **Ahmed, teaching staff, December 2011**

The teachers in the high schools have been placed in a difficult position as their level of competence in the English language is far below the level required to teach their students. This has been due to political decisions earlier on to take the teaching of English off the Libyan curriculum. The teachers have therefore graduated without proper language tuition themselves and are now expected to be able to deliver at a level far higher than their own level of competence.

## 7.4 Teachers’ Perceptions of Challenges

The university management and teachers were asked about what they found most challenging about teaching English at university level. There were four main factors suggested by the teachers (Figure 25).

How can teachers motivate students to spend more time and effort studying English
There is a very limited time to cover all the curriculum we are given
Students choose English at university not because of their ability or desire to learn the

language but because it will guarantee them a teaching job when they graduate
There is no support from the students' families

**Figure 25** Greatest challenges in teaching English February 2011

#### 7.4.1 Student Motivation

The teachers present a quite negative picture of the student motivation and interest in learning English, which is in contrast to the findings of Alhmali (2007) whose study of Libyan high school student attitudes towards English indicated such students were more interested in English than in other subjects. Learner attitudes are a significant factor in learning a language (Fakeye, 2010), but Abidin, Mohammadi and Alzwari (2012) also found negative attitudes in Libyan secondary school students towards learning English, which they attribute to English teaching strategies in the Libyan education system. A study of Saudi students carried out by Al-Zahrani (2008) suggested that the negative attitudes identified in those students may likewise be attributed to traditional teaching techniques.

In the focus group in February 2011 one teacher described the negative attitudes he encountered when teaching students, and commented that his students were not willing to participate in activities. Rather than become involved, they preferred to absent themselves from his presentation methods lesson as they were not encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. He suggested that this negativity resulted in the teacher also having a negative attitude as they were not able to interact in a positive way with their students.

Some students are very immature, they do not know how to act responsibly. When I was twenty years old, I was teaching in a school, very responsible. Sometimes they are very negative. When I taught presentation methods, they just ran away. Good students in the classroom can also improve teaching by giving feedback to teachers, but because most are negative, teachers are also negative. Positive students can build good relationships with the teacher and this is important in teaching. But the majority of students are negative, they prefer the old methodology so they can sit in the classroom and do nothing. **Focus group, February 2011**

Motivating students to learn English in Libya has been a great challenge, according to Ahmed.

From my experience I think the issue of motivating students is the most challenging thing about teaching English. Although many of them are already motivated, highly

motivated, but you sometimes find students not motivated and you need to try and motivate them to learn, because we know the importance of motivation in second or third foreign language learning. **Ahmed, teaching staff, February 2011**

Aisha believes that “the main problem is that English is only used in a university environment, not outside the classroom. There are lots of challenges and issues within the university, we cannot give a full English language lecture, most of the students would not understand.” The focus group in February 2011 felt that not mixing with native speakers was a real issue as students were learning the language the wrong way because of this. They suggested that the biggest problem was that they did not use English in their lives outside the classroom. Ahmed also believed this was a major problem.

Even when the students are willing and they are at a good level and they try to learn what people have given them, the problem of speaking remains, the problem of using the language. That’s because learning something is theoretically different from practising it, doing it. In Libya in the past we always had this problem of not finding, not having the chance of, the opportunity to speak the language. And so even when they know the grammar rules, and they know large stocks of vocabulary, and they know the rules of the language, they rarely have the chance to use the language and this is the real problem. **Ahmed, December 2011**

Soad is a recent graduate and just starting his teaching career at university. He suggests that the resources are in place for successful teaching, but the university teachers have not had the training in how to use these resources, therefore they are not using them to their full potential. He also indicates that large class sizes are common for English language classes, and that it is difficult trying to engage with individuals as the facilities are not always adequate.

Teaching is not an easy job, it’s psychological. You have to try and reach forty five individual students in a small room within a limited time so you have to be smart and do a quick scan for their personalities and the way you should address them, especially when you ask them to participate. This all needs time and experience. You sometimes face a problem with behaviours as all come from different backgrounds, you have to be flexible and have foresight. We have enough time for each course, they are trying to supply us with all we need, we have labs, smart boards, computers, cinema, we have all that. The problem is with us as teachers, we need training courses before we start the year – like how to use these things, which will interest the students. **Soad, teaching staff., October 2012**

#### 7.4.2 Limited Time

The time given for teaching at university was regarded as an issue, given that the students' level of English was so low to start with, and there was simply not enough time to cover the existing curriculum. In the survey teaching staff stated that one of their greatest challenges was "the very limited time devoted to teaching English"; and "the time isn't enough to complete the syllabus". They felt that students needed even more input to reach a level acceptable for university graduation and to prepare them with the knowledge for teaching English in Libyan schools.

We have a very limited period of time for teaching English, and that's not enough to implement or to cover the curriculum required or supposed to be covered or dealt with during the school or academic year. Therefore more time should be devoted to teaching English so we can make up the shortage that they have. **Ahmed, teaching staff, February 2011**

There was resentment on the part of the teachers that the English language had been subject to political manipulation, and that this was now having such an impact on English language skills. Khalifa was aware that people in professional positions did not have the necessary skills for communicating in English and that the decision to stop English language teaching previously had negatively affected professions such as university management and medical doctors.

The political side was very much affecting English language teaching in Libya. The disaster which was caused by Ahmed Ibrahim, he cancelled English language teaching across Libya, and the negative effect of this is still reflected today. The generation was banned from learning English. The university staff, doctors, all are unable to communicate in English. **Khalifa, teaching staff, December 2011**

Yasser argues that the political decision to stop English has resulted in teachers unable to pass on the skill of learning a language. Instead they have resorted to teaching the language as a theoretical subject, without anyone being able to apply the theory. He implies that the time spent learning English is not spent effectively.

If we look at the political side and how the politicians made English language a frozen language for many years, that is affecting everybody, even the English language teachers. Teaching methodology is old fashioned, the students only receive information and this is not an effective method. If students are sitting at their desk doing nothing, this method may be useful for teaching history or

geography or in a subject which has a lot of theory, but English language needs skills and skills need practice. We should not focus on the theory side. If you teach me in a classroom for a long time and then take me to the sea, I will never learn how to swim because this is a skill and we learn by applying. **Yasser, teaching staff, December 2011**

Some efforts had been put into making the teaching time more effective by setting up training courses for teachers under the Gaddafi regime. The Libyan National Report on Adult Learning and Literacy Education (GPCE, 2010) describes how a training centre was established to update teachers' skills and knowledge. This focused especially on English language and computer courses for teachers, yet the number of beneficiaries related to English language was fewer than those for the French language (Figure 26) and just thirty eight individuals benefited from extra training in English in the academic year of 2008 – 2009. It implies that the time allocated for training English teachers was not considered a priority.

	<b>Course</b>	<b>Number of beneficiaries</b>
1	English Language Teachers and inspectors	38
2	Heads of depts. and division managers	43
3	technical subjects inspectors	194
4	financial system operators in directorates	44
5	Social workers	1836
6	Training for shifting careers	770
7	school librarians	260
8	Training for educational qualification	6693
9	school laboratory supervisors	176
10	First training for secondary school principals	442
11	Refreshing courses in all subjects	13205
12	Training in France for French language teachers	48
13	education inspectors	969
14	Training examiners and evaluators on using Electronic examination systems	89
15	The International Computer Certificates IC3	3900
16	The basics of computers	1000
17	International Computer Driving Licence ICDL	3900
18	Second training for secondary school principals	487
19	Training for financial staff of private schools	9

**Figure 26** Training courses carried out by GCTT 2008 – 2009

Training which may have enabled the teachers to deliver the expected curriculum within the time constraints has also not been made available. It is evident that the teaching staff would prefer more time to teach the fundamentals of English to their students and they all concur that the entry level is too low for university. This indicates that the teachers are aware that



they need to raise the level of the English graduates, but they are not being given the necessary support. They perceive this as being extra time to cover the curriculum, given that the starting level of proficiency is so low for their students.

The problem of time devoted to English is not enough in the educational institutes in Libya, more time should be devoted to teaching English so that they would have more chance of contact with the teachers and the materials, which will obviously help them improve and develop. **Ahmed, teaching staff February 2011**

### **7.4.3 Guaranteed Employment**

The third area perceived as a challenge by the teachers refers to the reasons students choose to study English at university. According to the teachers, their students on the English courses are only interested in having English on their curriculum vitae; they see it as a guarantee of finding good employment.

Students are only looking for departments where they can get jobs from. They think they will get a job from the English department. There are lots of opportunities for jobs if you do English. Students are not interested in the English language, they only come for jobs, for certificates. **Focus group, February 2011**

The English language is now a global language, although more speak it as a second language rather than their native language (Crystal, 1997). It is used extensively in business and in science, and now also in social media. As mentioned earlier, the Dutch participants believe a command of English is essential for their futures, whether academic or commercial. There is evidence to support this; Warschauer (2000) states that by 1990 nearly half of the employed populations in the developed countries were involved in information-processing activities. Developing countries are also witnessing a growth in jobs related to information technology and, because of globalisation, English is the language used for communication (Warschauer, 2000). This means that having English language skills stated on a curriculum vitae can be desirable when looking for employment.

As indicated previously, there is a high unemployment rate across the Arab countries. According to the Libyan Ministry of Labour, unemployment in Libya is 15 per cent, although it has been widely reported that the more accurate figure is 30 per cent, and these are mainly young people (Waleed, 2013). Youth unemployment was one of the key factors

behind the demonstrations in 2011 (AfDB, 2012). It is therefore not unreasonable to think that young Libyan graduates are trying to find ways of securing their future prospects.

It has been accepted practice that Libyan graduates from the English departments at universities are guaranteed teaching jobs, whatever their English language skills; Hawana (1981) described the situation over thirty years ago, where:

After three years of studying English an average high school student in Libya cannot express himself in the simplest form of the written or spoken language. A number of these students will enrol in an English program and will be future high school English teachers. Most of the fourth-year students (at the university) cannot even look up words in a dictionary, pronounce words properly, speak fluently or write simple letters or reports.

Teaching is also regarded as an appropriate profession for women in Libya (Shihiba, 2011) and 79% of teachers in Libyan schools were female in the 2006-2007 academic year (GPCE, 2008:22). Generally the English proficiency levels for Libyans are among the lowest in the world, being at the bottom of the ratings across fifty-four countries (EF, 2012). However, although females across all Middle East countries may have a considerably higher proficiency rate than men, in education it is still surprising low; in Libya the base level for both men and women is very low proficiency (EF, 2012). Their communicative English language skills are, according to Orafi and Borg (2009: 251), undeveloped, which indicates that the university teachers' perceptions of their students having little interest in learning the language may have some validity.

#### **7.4.4 Family Support**

A further challenge for the teachers at university includes the lack of motivation towards learning English on the part of the students, impacted by a perceived lack of support from the families of these students.

The lost years when English was removed from the Libyan curriculum may be both a direct and indirect factor. Without a sound foundation in English at an early age, the high school teachers have no passion for teaching it, and therefore are unable to motivate and interest their students. Furthermore, families who had no English teaching themselves may not see the value of it in the lives of their own children. Studies have shown that social background has an impact, and the support from parents can impact performance and motivating in

learning a language (Williams et al, 2002: 523). This was recognised in February 2011 (Figure 25) by the university staff who felt that students were not being supported by their families.

Several teachers recommended that “giving students homework and exercises” would improve the teaching and learning of English. It has been shown that active family involvement, especially monitoring time spent on homework, is an important factor in educational success (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003). Although some other studies may disagree, Hough (2012) argues that homework develops study skills, helps to consolidate learning and gives teachers extra time to get students to required levels. This may be beneficial for teachers who are concerned about the limited classroom teaching time they have to raise English proficiency levels.

The focus group in February 2011 included a mixture of teaching staff and students. When the subject of family support arose, and the teachers complained of a lack of parental support, there was a rapid response from one student. He commented that support often came in the form of extra tuition being paid for by parents, or visits to English speaking countries where they could improve their language skills.

Don't compare all students, we come from different families. Some have had extra training, some have been abroad. Some families are very supportive, you can't judge all the same.  
**Student, focus group February 2011**

There are different ways in which families may be offering support, and these may not always be obvious to the teachers. Equally, the family support may be there for the students, but they choose not to accept it.

Even when students go to private classes, they are wasting their time. Their parents pay for them, but they don't want to learn anything. **Focus group, February 2011**

## **7.5 Curriculum**

The teachers have raised the issue of the curriculum. Ahmed commented earlier in this chapter about the lack of time to cover the curriculum, but Hameed indicates that there may in fact be no curriculum in place. He suggests that the teachers bring their own curriculum with them when they come to teach at university, and previously they may have

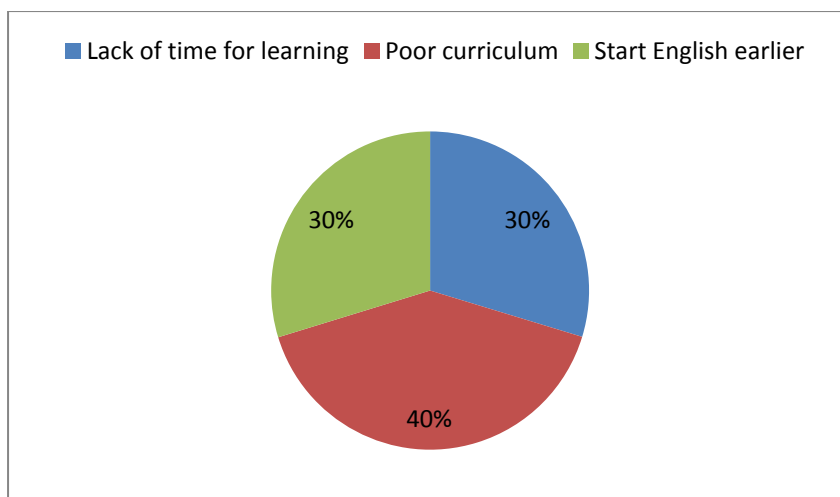
been teaching English at primary or secondary school. They continue teaching at that same level, which is not appropriate for university. In some cases the teachers who have studied on scholarship programmes abroad will bring in a curriculum well above the level of their students and there are complaints from the students. There is no standardisation across the university.

There is a difference between faculties with the curriculum. The teachers bring their old curriculum with them and start teaching with that. Often this is primary or secondary school level, too easy for university. Others bring a high level as they studied abroad and the students complain it is too difficult. There are different levels across the teachers. **Hameed, October 2012**

Aisha believed that the whole structure of the curriculum should be reviewed and that there should be a more cohesive strategy for teaching the entire university programme.

When I was a student I thought the curriculum was very difficult, it's not at the right level. But now I understand why, it's not organised. Research methods are being taught to second year English language students in the Arabic language. They need this in the fourth year, which is the right time for doing the proposal and the thesis. There is no organising of the syllabus, all are being taught at the wrong level. The teaching methodology is grammatical and traditional, very old. We should improve the subjects being taught, all should be taught in English, not Arabic. Why is Psychology not taught in the English language? It must be in English so we can improve our skills, our vocabulary, our methodology and so on. **Aisha, October 2012**

A cohesive and transparent curriculum across educational stages can benefit students and break down barriers to learning. Student aspirations are undermined by disconnected educational systems (Venezia et al, nd) and this may well have had an impact on the Libyan students. Curriculum was recognised by both students and university staff as being an area which needs to be addressed.



**Figure 27** Curriculum issues February 2011

The three main issues identified by respondents in February 2011 (figure 27) were a lack of time given for learning English, a poor curriculum, and a general feeling that the teaching of English should start at an earlier age. The teaching staff did not make any comment on the quality of the curriculum at this stage, but they became much more vociferous when interviewed in December 2011. Their comments were very specific and support the argument of Al-Rashdan (2009: 4), who suggests that curriculum is theoretical and philosophical across the Arab world, and does not reflect the need to match learning with what their society needs.

The curriculum is always agreed by the Head of Department. Sometimes the students complain and say it is so difficult for them. It is not matching what other teachers are teaching, there is no connection. There is a big issue in the curriculum. That's why students are sometimes afraid of some subjects because they think it is difficult for them to succeed and pass exams. There is a difference between every subject, some teachers make it very simple while others make it very difficult. There should be a standard as to what is required across all subjects. The levels are different. I wish one day we could go anywhere across Libya and find that we were teaching the same curriculum, that there was a standard across all universities. A united curriculum. Even in one university the subjects being studied are not the same across all the faculties. It's a big problem if a student has to change university campus. We should work very hard to make sure every department has the same model each year. **Asma, university teaching staff, December 2011**

Asma reflects on the inconsistency in curriculum, which leads to a lack of standardisation. Under the Ministry for Higher Education, there was a prescribed and controlled curriculum (Rhema et al, 2010), yet each department in a university seems to have had its own ideas on

what should be delivered. Additionally, they seem to have allowed the teachers total control.

Most of the university do not have a standard curriculum so the teaching staff can follow a syllabus. Every teaching staff member brings his own materials and teaches his own materials this year but next year there is a different teacher with his own different materials. There is no progression and if a student does not pass one year, then he gets a completely different course the next year instead of repeating the course. ***Khalifa, university teaching staff, December 2011***

Although Khalifa argues for a standardised curriculum, Tomlinson et al (2009: 18) suggest that the students of today need a curriculum designed to develop all students' potential. There is now more emphasis on diversity. However, what Khalifa is describing shows a lack of planning, and that should come from the management within the university. Within university teaching, lecturers are required to develop their own materials, but it is expected that there is an overall plan for what needs to be covered over the academic year. Khalifa's argument that there can be no progression without structure leads to the suggestion that many of the Libyan students are not improving their skills and knowledge, not just because of the level of teaching, but also because there is no guidance on the curriculum. According to Khalifa, the teachers have been able to teach whatever they want, without adhering to any structured plan, and to deliver their own materials.

On the other hand Khalifa argues that the curriculum materials were not suitable. She suggests that the curriculum was too politicised under Gaddafi, but as Sleeter (2005: 3) argues, curriculum is political; it is a medium through which society defines itself. Under the Gaddafi regime, Libya had no option but to define itself as a society led and controlled by Gaddafi. That was the reality of Libyan society. Knowledge in any society is political and, although the past may be modified, it cannot be obliterated without creating a vacuum and loss of identity: identity is memory (Booth, 2008). The interviews carried out by Doherty (2011) point to the challenges faced by the Libyan regime change, especially when its people do not have any experience or memory of a society apart from Gaddafi's rule.

Additionally, there does seem to be a mismatch between Khalifa's assertion that teachers delivered their own materials, and then to state that these materials were political. This would then predispose that the teachers themselves were the ones delivering the political content, and that they were the ones who had control over the curriculum they were

delivering. Khalifa places the blame on the management, but from her words, it seems that much of the blame for the content of the curriculum may lie with the teachers themselves.

All the curriculum was made to support the previous government. Wherever we go we had to read something about Gaddafi and his family. But I believe the curriculum material in the future will be used only for teaching English language, not for politics. We have to improve our knowledge now. All the management of the university have been working towards a political goal and this has been a big problem. *Khalifa, university teaching staff, December 2011*

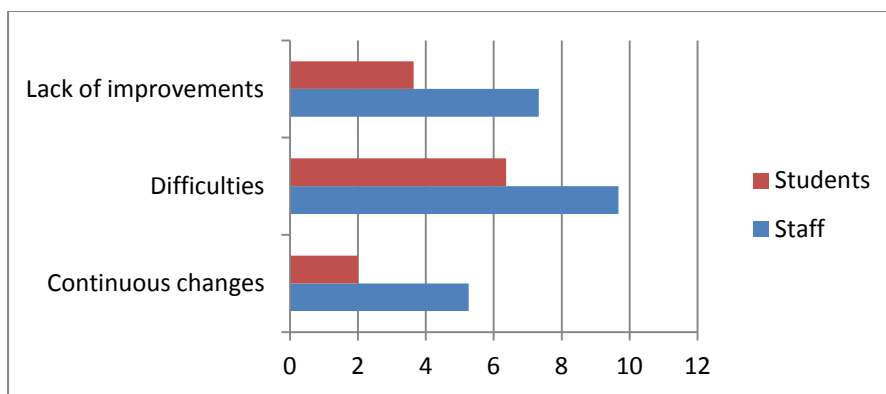
Khalifa is possibly naïve in her assumptions that there will be changes, as it takes time to bring about long-term improvements. These improvements will still need to be aligned to the environment within which she is teaching, and there will still be a political slant. It is interesting to compare her comments with a colleague's comments. Hassan is more realistic about the curriculum and its shortcomings and this reflects his position as an administrator, or one of the management staff of the university.

The curriculum was not flexible, hard to understand, sometimes changed without reason. It was never improved. There was a negative effect on the curriculum from the political side. *Hassan, university administrator, December 2011*

He sees the need for a more flexible curriculum, which is what Tomlinson et al (2009) advocate. His opinion is that reviews of the curriculum may well have improved it, and this is again a very modern concept. Curriculum is dynamic, and is constantly evolving, and Hassan realises this.

There are both challenges and opportunities in the development and design of any curriculum but especially after violent conflict in a country. Paulson (2011) suggests that the focus should be on ways of using the past to help students learn important and often difficult lessons which will help them in the future. This is not going to be an easy task but the university staff show their approval for a revision.

In the earlier surveys in February 2011, the challenges of the curriculum were identified mainly as a lack of improvements, the difficulties in understanding it and having the time to cover all that was needed, plus the constant changes that were made. Figure 28 shows how these affected both students and staff.



**Figure 28** Challenges of curriculum February 2011

As may be expected, the academic staff were more critical of the curriculum, yet both staff and students rated the challenges equally. Both were aware of the difficulties encountered in the curriculum and see this as the main challenge. In the new Libya this may still be a challenge. When curriculum is seen as having failed, then there is often a desire for comprehensive change; the failure is often attributed to politics, yet any reform needs to take into account political factors (Arnold, 2004). In this respect, Arnold (2004) concludes that minimal technical change can enhance an organisation, especially if it is rich in symbolic action. It seems that the symbolic gesture of taking Gaddafi politics out of the curriculum may satisfy staff such as Khalifa and Hassan, and a gradual process of reviewing and revising the new curriculum may stabilise the situation. Curriculum is subject to political influence and Jordaan (2004) argues that such external influences can result in rapid and visible change, yet more meaningful academic reform can take years, especially when designing an integrated curriculum.

There was also criticism of the teachers who made no effort to cover the curriculum because they shortened their teaching hours, or because they were foreign and used a non-Libyan curriculum.

Some teachers don't cover all the curriculum and don't use all the teaching time per lesson. Some of the foreign staff bring their own curriculum from India or Iraq and don't even follow the Libyan curriculum. **Teaching staff, focus group, February 2011**



However, there is no indication that there was any reduction in the quality of what the students were learning in comparison with other teachers. Without a defined curriculum, it was difficult to make any assessment on whether students were progressing.

### **7.5.1 Teaching Approaches**

The teachers may recognise the deficiencies in their own teaching methods, but suggest that these are the traditional ways that students expect. Asma describes how her students were afraid when she started to question them during her teaching session. They were unaccustomed to being asked to participate in a class, as the teacher in the focus group in February 2011 mentioned earlier in this chapter. Furthermore, when Asma tried explaining in English, they could not understand. She had to use Arabic and then they could understand enough not to make mistakes in English. Asma saw an improvement in the students' use of grammar once she explained in Arabic. This would certainly not encourage other teachers to use English in their classes, even although they knew it was the right thing to do. The lack of time and the large classes would make it very difficult for teachers not to try and find an easier solution.

I am not satisfied with my own teaching methodology for more than one reason. From an early age we used to learn by memorising, by repeating by rote, by learning off by heart. The teachers speak and we are silent. The same thing happens to me. I talk and leave the students silent. I try to encourage myself. For example, last year something happened to me. I tried to encourage the students in every part of the lesson, while I was teaching and explaining something, I kept asking questions. I was trying to improve the teaching by asking questions and seeing if someone could give me examples in the class. Some students complained about this unusual teaching method. They said you are shocking us by asking us these questions, we are used to listening to the teachers. Therefore I now try and find a middle way so that I don't frighten the students, so they don't get bothered by my asking questions. **Asma, teaching staff, December 2011**

However, in contrast to Asma, Khalifa did make special efforts to ensure her students participated and she was rewarded by seeing an improvement in their confidence and their presentation skills.

Teaching methodology is old fashioned. The teacher is doing everything in the class. Students only work as the receiver. All the teachers are using the lecture method. They come to the class, stand in front of the blackboard, speak, speak, speak, one hour thirty minutes, he explains and the students only listen. I did some improvements myself, made students do presentations and then observed this. I helped them improve. This method improved my students and gave them more confidence. You should have eighty per cent by

the student, not by the teacher. When the teacher is helping them and supporting them, they are doing only twenty per cent of the activities. **Khalifa, December 2011**

The focus group in February 2011 believed that there should be a better relationship between teacher and student and the students in the focus group felt they were not treated as individuals. They believed that the teachers did not take a personal interest in them.

All teachers should have a dialogue with students, a two-way conversation. They should have more time getting to know us, why we are here, what we are doing. There is no respect for students. **Student, focus group, February 2011**

However, the teachers' response to this was that the classes were simply too large for them to have enough time to get to know individual students. Additionally the teachers complained that students came late to class or did not even bother turning up, as they were not interested in their studies.

Two-way dialogues are missing for this reason: there are too many students in the classroom, we don't have time to communicate with everyone. I am teaching groups of 120 students, how can I communicate with them? If every student spoke just one word, that would be 120 words. Students don't care about timing. I am always on time as a lecturer, but students come late. Some students don't even attend any classes, they spend all day sitting outside talking with others. **Teaching staff, focus group, February 2011**

Different teaching approaches may be successful as there is no specific methodology that is recommended for university language classes. The challenge may be more in finding a way of engaging the students and encouraging them to participate and take an interest in English. Recent research from Australia indicates that methodology should be relevant to the context in which it is taught (Mahboob & Tilakaratna, 2012); they suggest that the ultimate goal is:

to ensure that students can use the language with the proficiency required to enhance their prospects in accessing better opportunities in education and employment within their own contexts and/or globally. (Mahboob et al, 2012)

Canagarajah (1999) and Martin (2005) argue that effective teachers adapt practices and curriculum to serve the needs of their students. Teachers who do not have the experience, training, time or resources may reject the policies and materials and this may lead to the conclusion that their students are lazy or non-receptive (Mahboob et al, 2012). As mentioned above, Khalifa is trying to adapt the practices familiar to her students and become more effective as a teacher.

## 7.6 Teaching Quality

There are different perspectives when it comes to the quality of teaching. Students comment on what they perceive to be the quality of the teaching they receive, while the teaching staff comment on the lack of provision of seminars to help them teach. The university management complain about unqualified and inexperienced teachers, and it is interesting to note (figure 29) that the university staff view the lack of experienced teachers as being the main issue with the quality of provision, whereas the teaching staff feel that they are not provided with enough training. While the teaching staff made no comment on teaching qualifications, both students and university staff are not happy with the teaching staff's qualifications.

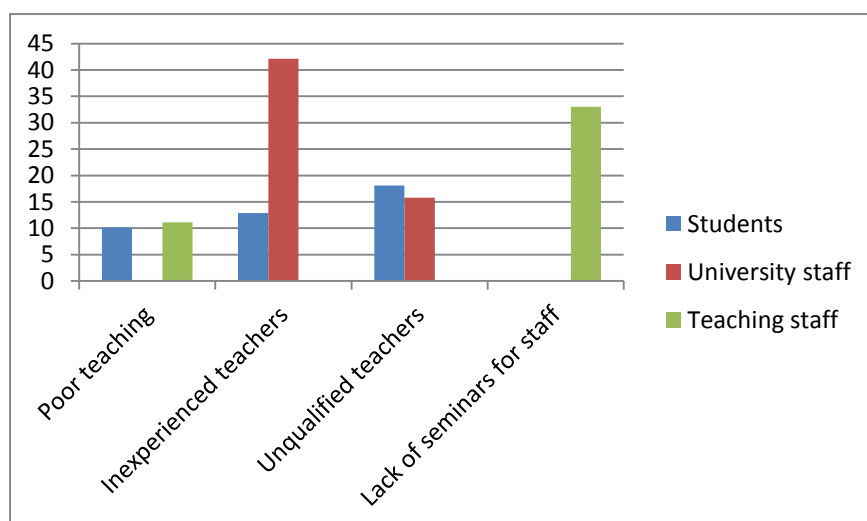


Figure 29 Teaching issues February 2011

Teaching English at the universities has long suffered from a lack of qualified and competent teachers, and foreign staff were brought in to fill the gaps. With the outbreak of civil war in 2011, the foreign teachers left the country very quickly and there was a serious shortage of English teachers at this level. However, the issues related to teaching English at university were still evident when the teachers were predominantly Libyan. Many of the problems relating to a lack of qualified teachers overall have an historic origin; from 1969 onwards insufficient numbers of teachers have been trained to meet the demands of an expanding, youthful population (Elmajdob, 2004). There was a particular shortage of teachers for the tertiary level in the area of sciences and foreign languages (Elmajdob, 2004), possibly due to better financial rewards in the developing oil industry.

An additional factor in the removal of English from the curriculum in 1986 resulted in university teachers also not having the English language skills to teach at an advanced level. Hameed understands the difficulties in recruiting Libyan teachers for English language positions at the university. In 2011 the majority of foreign teaching staff left Libya as quickly as they could when the civil war developed. This meant that there was nobody to replace them in the universities. At the end of 2012 Hameed was finding it almost impossible to recruit English language teachers. He no longer wanted the responsibility of head of department as he knew it was not possible to fill the teaching places with qualified and competent staff.

University teachers are not qualified to teach. We face lots of problems: there is no clear curriculum for the teachers, we are not united through Libya. Teachers who graduated from Libyan universities do not have the right qualifications to teach. I was head of department but I no longer want the responsibility. It is too hard dealing with this. There is a big lack of English language teachers in Libya. We are fighting to find one for this department.  
**Hameed, teaching staff, October, 2012**

The quality of the teachers at the university is below expectations; Hassan, head of registration at the university, is also critical of the commitment of the teaching staff. He argues that the teachers do not fulfil their duties and teach the hours for which they are being paid. Moreover, he reflects that the relationship between teacher and student is not an equal relationship, it is hierarchal, and the teacher is unwilling to accept any diversification from his own instruction.

The teachers do what they want. The lecture should be two hours and they teach whatever time they like, sometimes forty five minutes, sometimes one hour. Some teachers waste time checking absences, they don't teach properly. The relationship between the teacher and student is dictatorial. If the students do not listen to the teacher, the teacher says they are not good. **Hassan, head of registration, December 2011**

Hameed also comments on the commitment of the teaching staff. This was a year after Hassan's criticism and indicates that no progress has been made over the year in terms of teachers being committed to their work. This lack of commitment would seem to be directed at the Libyan teachers, for by the end of 2011 the majority of foreign teachers had fled the country.

Another problem is the lack of commitment by the teachers. Teachers who teach in this department, and I am taking responsibility for what I am saying, lectures should be two

hours. It is rare for someone to take more than one and a half hours. Most spend a lot of time doing nothing, not teaching, and only give about one hour to the students. They spend about fifteen minutes on attendance registers, most come in late, so usually a maximum of one hour fifteen minutes for a two hour lesson is given to the students. **Hameed, October 2012**

Inexperienced teachers can often hide their inexperience behind fresh, innovative and creative ideas, especially when they have an enthusiasm for teaching; yet the motivating lessons they deliver are often at the expense of routine and practice (Kilianska-Przybylo, 2012). Numan et al (2000: 112) find that inexperienced teachers have a different focus in the classroom and are more concerned with classroom dynamics than experienced teachers; they also are more likely to evaluate their own teaching performance more negatively. It is, nevertheless, more likely that inexperienced teachers are not yet fully aware of how to manage the large classes and communicative strategies, which have been identified in the Libyan classrooms. Even the teachers are not confident in the quality of their own teaching delivery, as they highlighted poor teaching as being one of the issues (Figure 29).

Mentoring is now a common means of supporting inexperienced teachers and Mulkeen et al's (2008) study points out that it can be more effective than formal teacher training; this is because it is practical rather than theoretical. There are also other ways of supporting inexperienced staff, such as providing textbooks which have notes for teachers on how to use the materials properly (Harwood, 2010: 14; Crawford, 2008: 82). This then becomes a management issue rather than a teacher shortcoming. The number of teaching staff identifying the lack of seminars in Figure 29 reflects the need for more management support. Management recognises that inexperienced teachers are an issue, yet there is no evidence that they are seeking to resolve this by providing basic mentoring or training seminars, which would help the inexperienced teachers.

It is interesting to note that students identified teachers as being unqualified (Figure 29). This is a surprising observation, as it can be expected that students may be able to judge inexperience from a teacher's practice in the classroom, but qualifications are not usually subjected to such scrutiny. Additionally, it is normally the experience of a teacher which dictates the quality of their delivery, rather than their qualifications. Many well qualified

teachers are not effective teachers (Stansbury, 2010). Indeed the latest report from Ofsted (2010/11) records that, despite an intensive programme of teacher training for Further Education teachers, and a requirement for them to be qualified, there had not been the level of performance anticipated.

From the perspective of the management of the universities, sufficient teachers need to be employed to cover the teaching of classes. Where there is a shortage, then management often has no option but to employ non-qualified teaching staff, despite the impact this may have on the quality of education (VSO, 2011). In Libya shortages have been created in the universities due to two main factors: one is that more students have been taking up university places and there is not enough supply of teachers to fulfil the demand; the other is that so many of the more experienced teachers from the universities have taken up the opportunity to study abroad on scholarships; in 2010 there were more than eight thousand Libyan students at UK universities alone (Maslen, 2011) . This created gaps of four years or longer, as most of the teachers taking advantage of these scholarship opportunities were on PhD programmes around the world.

By December 2011 the teaching staff were more prepared to articulate the specific requirements they had, discussing teacher training sessions rather than seminars. Sarah concedes that the materials they have for teaching are satisfactory, but the problem is the teachers do not know how to use them.

They have very good materials in the secondary schools...the teachers are not prepared to teach these materials correctly, these materials are not being used properly. ***Sarah, university teaching staff, December 2011***

This comment matches the inexperience of the teachers, as many do not know how to use the materials with which they have been provided. It is also interesting to note that Sarah is not commenting on the political content of the materials, which Khalifa had attributed to the poor curriculum issues. There is a possibility that Khalifa was using the opportunity in December 2011 to focus on the Gaddafi regime and to blame its undoubted shortcomings on areas of concern in the teaching field. After not being in a position previously to criticise the regime, perhaps she was too ready to apportion blame. In her own words she had already stated that the teachers prepared their own materials and that these did not correlate with what other teachers were delivering.

For many years it has been common for native English speakers to become teachers in foreign countries as a means of supporting themselves while travelling. As Li (2005: 77) comments, it is well acknowledged that native speakers do not necessarily know how their own language operates, and therefore they may not have the awareness or competence to teach English. This is an issue in China where the supply of English language teachers cannot keep up with the demand and Li (2005: 75) states that this has damaged the English language training industry, as the Chinese have been unable to differentiate between user competence and teacher competence. In Hong Kong only about fourteen per cent of the fourteen thousand English language teachers are properly qualified (Lee, 2005: 37).

The quality of the teacher training also has an impact. Studies of developing countries have shown that poorly qualified teachers are in fact not much more effective than poor unqualified teachers (Rao, 2004). Sarah advocates teacher training sessions for the English language teachers. In Libya there has not been any special training for teachers at university level.

English language teachers should be looked after at every stage. There should be teacher training sessions for them. ***Sarah, university teaching staff, December 2011***

There is also an argument for continuing professional development, to ensure that the inexperienced, the newly qualified, and perhaps even the unqualified, benefit from the experiences of others. In the UK it has been noted that teachers with just one or two years of experience are more likely to participate in such developmental activities, as they seek to learn more about pedagogy (House of Commons, 2011: 281). This aligns with Al-Jadidi's (2009: 35) findings that many teachers in Oman are not well trained in pedagogies, despite a well-established teacher training programme. It is often difficult for inexperienced teachers to apply theory to practice (Al-Mahrooqi, 2011: 13). One suggestion has been to encourage reflective practice through action research, as this is a way of exploring the relationship between theory and practice (Costello, 2011: 24). This is likely to appeal more to teachers at university level, and serve to support the inexperienced, the unqualified and provide a framework for teacher development, all areas of concern noted by the students and university staff in February 2011.

## 7.7 A Way Forward

All the participants were asked to identify ways in which the teaching of English in Libyan universities could be improved. They identified three main areas: schools; exposure to English; and teacher training.

### 7.7.1 Focus on Schools

In the surveys carried out in February 2011, many of the responses that came back indicated that more work was needed at the earlier educational stages. Suggestions from teachers included: “teach English language from the first class; start at a very early age; concentrate more on the younger learners; it’s better to start early so we grow up with the language”.

The students also agreed that they needed to start learning English in schools: “learn English in primary school; we started too late; develop English language information especially in secondary schools; encourage teachers at school to prepare you for higher education”. A surprising number of first year students wrote their comments in English, whereas the final year students preferred to write in Arabic. This may represent a change in the attitude towards learning English and could be a positive indicator for the future.

Ahmed also argues that the problems of the teaching of English language in Higher Education are grounded at the school level and that the Ministry of Education should focus on the primary and secondary schools to find a solution. He suggests that they need to be at intermediate level by the time they reach university and that, if they were, then the universities would be dealing with students at proficiency level.

The concern and the attention should be paid to the lower levels or lower education stages like at the preparatory and secondary schools. That is where the students are supposed to do their first two or three years of proficiency in English. I mean they are supposed to pass the beginners and pre-intermediate levels there so when they come to university to continue their studies, they are supposed to be, they must be, at least at intermediate level. So the problem, the solution of the problem, starts at that education stage, I mean at preparatory and secondary school. This is where the solution starts. The attention of the government and the Ministry of Education should and really must pay attention to those education stages before trying or thinking of solving a problem at university level. **Ahmed, teaching staff, December 2011**

The Libyan government has been attempting various solutions at the primary and secondary school stage in order to improve English language teaching. As Rhema and Miliszewska (2012) argue, education holds the key to Libya’s future; however, they also stress that the

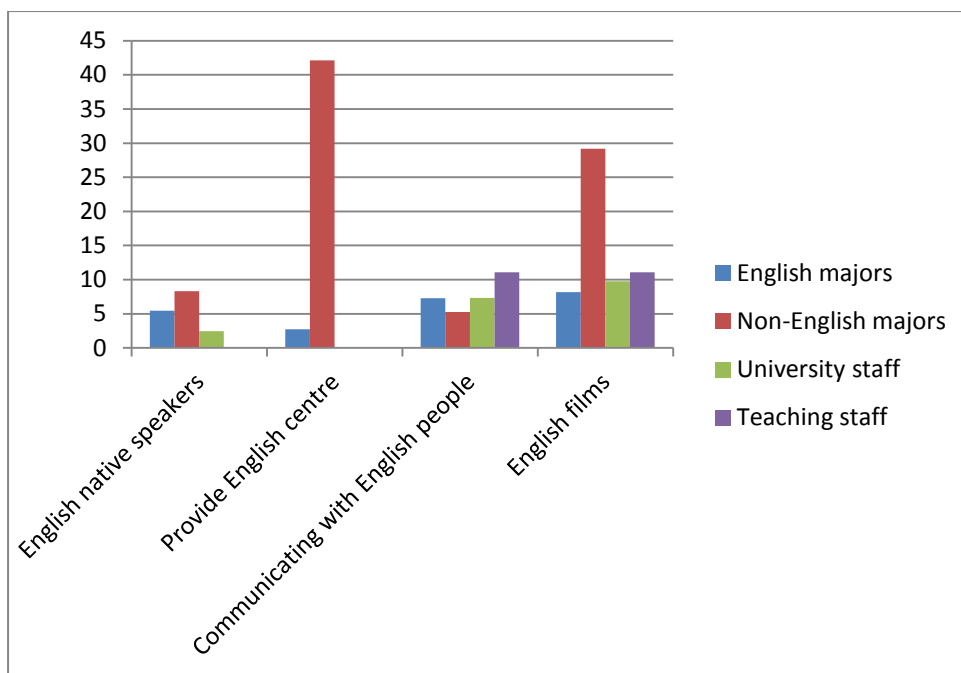


educational infrastructure has suffered from the recent armed conflict, with many resources destroyed and both students and teachers killed. Although this may seem a huge setback, it does mean that there is an opportunity to restructure and redevelop the education system; but it also means that it will take time.

Introducing English language at an earlier stage in the school system may be one solution, but it is not necessarily the right solution at this time, given that the quality of English teachers in the school system needs to be addressed. Other countries differ on the benefits and time allocation set aside for learning a foreign language at school. Whereas France determines that all children should be taught a foreign language for at least 54 hours a year from the time they start primary school, the UK has no set minimum time recommendation and leaves any decision to individual schools (European Commission, 2012). Many experts disagree with the consensus that early learners have an advantage in language learning. Ali (2011: 8) suggests that adults may learn more efficiently and there is no loss of language ability over time, and Munoz (2009: 155) argues there is no evidence that younger starters reach a higher level of proficiency. Piske (2007: 301-314) also comments that spending years in a foreign language classroom will not help students learn a foreign language well.

### **7.7.2 Exposure to English Language**

The survey carried out in February 2011 produced some interesting results regarding interaction with English native speakers (figure 30). Having native English speakers in the universities was not highly regarded. The non-English majors were slightly more in favour than the English majors, but there was not wide approval for this suggestion. A surprising number of non-English majors advocated the provision of English centres, which may have been a reaction to the acquisition of English in order to find employment. They were also the ones who most agreed English language films were a way to improve their language skills. At the time of this survey Libya was still ruled by Gaddafi and the opportunities for communicating with English nationals were limited. Nevertheless, a substantial minority of students and university staff believed that they should find ways of interacting with English people in order to improve their language.



**Figure 30** Ways of improving English language skills, February 2011

The non-English majors appeared to have more interest in finding ways to improve than the English majors, who would have been expected to make the most of any opportunity where they could use their English skills. This indicates that there may be some evidence for the perceptions the teachers have that these students were taking the English course mainly because it offered a teaching job at graduation, not because of any particular interest in learning the language.

However, some final year English majors did see the language as a means of communication and were looking for ways in which they could practise their skills. One suggested:

...listening to music, reading novels and trying to find the meaning of difficult words. We can connect with friends from different countries and chat with them to improve the language.

Others wanted “American or British teachers; to communicate with English families; watch serious programmes; dialogue with people in the street; watch television; speak English in class”. The first-year students commented: “study in English speaking countries; talk with English people; use the language every day; have more project work; learn by the internet; wish all Libyans could speak English; listen to native speakers on television; have a personal interview in English; find people who can speak English with me”.

This suggests that there has been the intention to interact with English speakers and utilise the language, despite the limitations at that time. In the focus group in February 2011, one fourth year student said: “If you meet a foreign person and he needs help, then you’ll be able to help him and give him information.” However, as other students said: “We don’t use English in our lives; We do not mix with English native speakers and we learn the language the wrong way because of this”.

The teachers in the focus group in November 2011 also recognised the limitations of not being able to practise English: “There is nothing outside the classroom, no use of English; In Libya in the past we always had this problem of not finding, not having the chance of, the opportunity to speak the language; What’s the point of me listening to the English teacher for two hours and then going back home and not speaking the language?”

By October 2012 the teachers were still aware that there were not enough opportunities for their students to use English: “There are no English newspapers in Libya; The most important thing is being able to practise the English language; There should be English native speakers teaching at university level; Put students in situations where they can’t get through without speaking English, they can’t understand without English; Bring English native speakers to workshops.”

Although there is still an issue in gaining exposure to the English language, there is a change of focus by the end of 2012. The teachers are prepared to offer practical solutions, instead of simply complaining about the lack of opportunities for practising English. This suggests that they are much more optimistic about the future and the possibility that there will be more interaction with English native speakers.

### **7.7.3 Teacher Training**

The training of teachers was the third area where the university staff felt improvements could be made. In February 2011 teaching staff were suggesting: “Training courses for the teachers; Make sure of the educational level of teachers as most of them are very weak; Have more courses for teachers in order to prepare them properly.” As was previously mentioned, very few English language teachers were given the opportunity of updating their skills and knowledge by attending training courses. Yet the focus group in February 2011

highlighted the problem: “Some teachers have experience of delivering knowledge but others do not”.

In November 2011 the focus group commented that: “The curriculum changed, it is too hard, even the teachers cannot teach it”. This suggests that no training was given to teachers, even when there were fundamental changes which required some guidance. There is also a question over the amount of guidance received in initial teacher training:

Most of the students who are qualified in the English department at university level do not study teaching methodology and this is a big problem for teaching. They neglect teaching methodology. **Khalifa, December 2011**

There are no specific guidelines for teaching in universities. The effectiveness of the methods being used depends on student satisfaction (Theall and Franklin, 2001), and research indicates that these student evaluations tend to be reliable and valid (Murray, 1994). In a study by Sajjad (2009), the students rated the lecture method as the best teaching method for university education, as it can be used for large classes and the material is structured. However, according to Delaney, Johnson et al (2010), there are certain characteristics that students expect in a university teacher and the most important is competence, both in their subject knowledge and in pedagogy; this includes maintaining currency in their subject area as well as keeping updated with changes in teaching approaches. It is therefore a concern that student teachers are not studying teaching methodology, as this will impact on their effectiveness as a teacher. Nor are they gaining from the experiences they are having while in a student role, given that the university teaching staff have limited opportunities for training.

Yasser has a very sensible recommendation that progress on improving the teaching of English language in university should be progressed at a steady pace, without great changes, so that success will come gradually. He suggests all the areas which need attention and there is no doubt that it will take time to address all of these properly. The teachers need more training to update their skills, they should learn about modern methodologies, and they should encourage their students to participate in the classroom.

For good solutions we do not need to rush, it should be steady progress, don't make any rash decisions. We have to be patient. Because of what happened in the past, we need something professional which will succeed. Look at the Western countries, look at Europe and Britain for example. All the world is united now through the internet. Our teachers

should have training sessions to improve their skills. We should have more training for teachers and teach them modern methodology. We should have interactive education so the students can participate in the lesson. The teacher is not just a speaker who talks and leaves. **Yasser, December 2011**

It is evident that the teaching staff regard the lack of teacher training to be one of the greatest challenges for them. From the teachers interviewed in February 2011 through until those interviewed in October 2012, training continued to be highlighted as an issue. Soad suggests that teachers need proper training, especially in new methodology.

We need to be trained in psychological teaching skills and we need updates on new methods. The main challenge is for teaching the class, how to communicate with the students, keep them interested. We should use tricks, surprises, challenges and work in teams. **Soad, October 2012**

The methodology was also criticised by Ali, who wants a complete overhaul of the traditional approach and for teaching to become student-centred and more inclusive. His suggestion is to make more use of videos and for English language to be used in the classroom instead of Arabic.

We should get rid of the memorising method, the copy and paste. We should involve students to participate by using pictures. It should be a student-centred focus. We should have all the teaching aids so children can touch things. We need to improve our teachers, our aids, our classrooms. Have videos and use English language not Arabic in the classroom. **Ali, Head of Faculty of Education, October 2012**

This suggests that many of the teachers do have good ideas for improvement, but the implementation of these ideas has not yet materialised. There are signs that teacher training is regarded as a priority by the new government; in April 2013 three hundred Libyan teachers started a one year teacher training programme in France (Fornaji, 2013). This was an initiative to help with the unemployment rates in Libya, whereby French language graduates are to be trained to teach French in Libyan schools. It is encouraging as it is in the plans of the Libyan government to develop the teaching of foreign languages in Libya (Fornaji, 2013).

## **7.8 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that most people prefer English to be taught in schools from the age of six, giving students the opportunity to be better prepared for university. The teachers

were disappointed at the low level of English when students entered university, as they expected them to be at proficiency level. However, there was general consensus that the quality of the teaching in schools was poor, with many of the primary and secondary school teachers unable to communicate in English, even though they were teaching the language.

The challenges of trying to teach in Libyan universities were manifold. Motivating the students was a difficult task and it was suggested that many of the students studying English language were doing so simply in order to have a guaranteed job in teaching. The teachers complained of not having enough time to get students to the level they required and of having classes too large for the proper interaction needed for language teaching. There was also criticism that political manipulation had caused many of the problems they were now experiencing. Lack of exposure to the English language was regarded as an issue.

The Libyan curriculum is not thought to be preparing the students properly as the teachers complain of a lack of structure, planning, and guidance. The curriculum was described as non-existent. Although it is suggested that the curriculum was highly politicised under the Gaddafi regime, there is some discrepancy on this, as it seems that the teachers themselves have been allowed to teach whatever they judge fit. In any curriculum, there has to be some political content to reflect the environment and the society in which it is embedded. Yet there have been challenges with the curriculum, with both students and staff in February 2011 agreeing that there were difficulties in understanding what was required, that there was no review to try and improve it, and finally that it was subject to continuous change. This change appears to have occurred even within departments of the same university, and there has been no consistency or stability in what is being taught. Consequently, there has been a lack of student progress and progression. This has not been a good preparation for motivating English language students, nor for incentivising staff.

Within the universities there was concern that teachers were not properly qualified and that their skills and knowledge were not updated. Teaching methods were criticised, along with the lack of training available and the commitment of many of the teachers was questioned. However, many of the teachers are inexperienced, due to the numbers of more experienced staff sent abroad on scholarships. This also has an impact on motivation as the students complain of poor teaching. The university management believe this is caused by

inexperienced teachers and some of the students agree, although more students tend to suggest this is because the teachers are unqualified. Teaching staff feel that seminars would help them improve. Although the management acknowledge the inexperience of teaching staff, they do not offer any support. Yet they are aware that they have had to employ these inexperienced, and perhaps unqualified, teachers in order to meet demand. Simple support systems could be put in place, and may indeed satisfy the needs of students and teachers. Mentoring or continuing professional development activities could well lead to better relationships, improved attitudes, and more motivation. These in turn may help to focus on the importance of English to Libyans in the global economy, and the relationship of English to future prospects.

It is encouraging that the Libyan government is wanting to promote the teaching of foreign languages in Libya and has initiated a teacher training programme in collaboration with France. This kind of initiative for English would be much welcomed by the teaching staff in the universities, given that it focuses on improving the subject area as well as teaching methodology; these were the areas of concern for the teachers interviewed, whose suggestions for improvement also highlighted these areas.

The next chapter summarises the findings of this study and concludes the thesis. From the results of the investigation, it then presents recommendations as well as scope for further research.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises and concludes the findings of the study. It reviews the aims and objectives of the study and how these have been met. The chapter also describes the limitations of the study and its contribution, as well as scope for further research. Finally, it concludes with recommendations based on the findings of the investigation.

### **8.2 General Summary**

#### **8.2.1 The Context**

Despite a large amount of investment in education, there are fundamental problems within the system. Libya has high literacy rates but, according to the data collected from the teachers and students in this study, it is still not producing English language graduates with the level of skills and knowledge required by a country wanting to interact and engage with a global community. There are various causes for this; for many years the teaching of English was banned in Libya and the qualified and experienced teachers at that time were forced to re-train for other teaching posts or professions. This resulted in a lack of proficient English teachers when the teaching of English was reinstated in 1991, and eventually made compulsory in 2005. The methodology for teaching languages had changed in recent years and Libya had no experience of interactive and communicative approaches. Exposure to the English language has been limited and teachers have not been trained in using modern technology as a teaching aid.

Across the Arab world there has been a demand for university places and the resources and facilities available have not been able to keep up with this demand. The quality of the education provided has sometimes been compromised in the need to provide university places for large numbers of students. It has been recognised that one of the most significant challenges to education in the Arab states is the curriculum design, which is believed not to encourage critical thinking. Other factors are overcrowded classrooms and a low professional standing for teachers, who are poorly paid. In Libya these issues are also in evidence, but they have been aggravated by the political changes and a consequent lack of strategy, leading to inconsistent standards across the country.



A building programme was initiated under the Gaddafi regime, and international expertise was brought in to support this. There was evidence of university building programmes being developed to international standards, although this has been put on hold because of the political situation. It is suggested that it may take longer to bring this to fruition now as new processes and relationships need to be developed, but it is also likely that there will be an even greater demand for university places and English language skills. Various initiatives have been suggested to cater for this demand. Recent projects have been encouraging the development of technology in education, although this has made slow progress due to an inadequate infrastructure. Other initiatives have included setting up digital libraries to allow access to educational resources. There may be resistance to electronic communication as face-to-face interaction is preferred, and political barriers may also hold back the development of long-term investment in technology.

A substantial scholarship programme was set up during the Gaddafi regime and graduates were encouraged to improve their skills by studying in foreign universities and then returning to Libya to teach. However, this meant that many of the university teaching staff have been abroad for up to five years and there has subsequently been a serious lack of teachers at university level. This has led to recruitment of foreign staff, who are unsupported by the system. A traditional method of teaching in Arab countries, which is a mechanical process of learning to pass exams, is seen as a major barrier to introducing new approaches, as it is part of Libyan culture. Teachers are wary of changing this system as they may be blamed for the failure of students if they use a different approach. The teacher training programmes are inadequate and new teachers tend to copy the way they were taught themselves, therefore reinforcing the traditional approach.

### **8.2.2 Methodology**

An initial visit to Libya was made in October 2010 to identify issues and about two hundred cards were collected and subsequently analysed. These cards formed the basis for the questionnaires. The card collection method worked very well as the participants were all eager to give their opinions, and it was a very effective way of identifying the main issues across all the categories involved, given that students, teaching staff and university management all contributed. This was also carried out efficiently as arrangements were made in advance for the visits to the universities and inductions took place at set times. At

this stage there were no problems with the data collection, and it was anticipated that further visits would be conducted in an equally smooth manner.

The questionnaires were developed and piloted with fourteen participants involving both students and teaching staff across three UK universities. This helped refine the survey questions in preparation for the distribution of the questionnaires. It was very useful having this pilot to check that the questionnaires were going to produce the desired results and this was a valuable exercise, getting feedback from other researchers as well as more experienced university staff. Without this input, the resulting questionnaires would not have been so effective at eliciting the required data.

The first presentations about the project's aims took place in Libya in February 2011, and the data collection began with completion of questionnaires and some arranged interviews. At this stage the civil war began in Libya and it became very difficult to collect data as all group meetings were banned. It took much longer than expected to get the required data as the political situation deteriorated. The methodology approach was appropriate but the timing was not. There was no indication that demonstrations were about to disrupt the country, therefore plans could not have been changed in advance. Once the data collection started, it was also difficult to make a judgement on whether to continue under extreme circumstances, or whether to cancel the interviews. A decision was made to collect as much as possible, and this was the right decision at the time. With hindsight, it should probably not have taken place as it was not possible to get the required number of interviews.

Although some data had been gathered, there seemed insufficient evidence to make a valid analysis, and this was why a further visit to Libya was carried out in December 2011, although the country was still very unsettled. More data were added to the information already collected and this gave a different perspective. However, it was still necessary to have these further interviews to add to what had already been analysed. The data were being analysed in isolation, yet Libya was in transition and a decision was made to contextualise the Libyan findings. Therefore, in June 2012 some interviews took place with Dutch students and teaching staff in order to be able to compare a changing and developing country with a well-established Western European country. This was extremely interesting for this study and was worthwhile as it gave a comparative analysis. It was carried out as an

experiment, but this should have been used as part of the original research approach as it gave the investigation more value.

Because of the evolving situation in Libya, a final visit took place in October 2012 to collect more data which would give an up-to-date assessment of the issues in Libyan education. The four visits to Libya allowed an insight into the challenges of transition: the first visit in October 2010 was to a country controlled by Gaddafi; the second visit in February 2011 was when Libya was erupting into civil war; the third visit in December 2011 was to a country governed by a transitional council; and the final visit in October 2012 was to the new Libya finding its way under an elected leadership. This approach was not anticipated at the start of this investigation; it has been led by events. Despite this, it has provided an unexpected insight into a changing Libya.

### **8.3 Aims of Study**

#### **8.3.1 Importance of English**

The first aim of this study was to identify the importance of the English language to Libyans. It can be seen that there is some ambivalence about this. Whilst there is recognition that English is an international language, there still seems to be some reluctance from Libyan students to immerse themselves in the language to try and raise their level of achievement. Students taking English as their major subject did not see communication as being a primary factor for learning the language. This was in contrast to those not taking English as their major, who all put a high value on communication, indicating that they were learning the language because they wanted to use it. It raises the question of why the English majors are wanting to study the language, given that international companies pay premiums for language ability. However, whilst the English majors acknowledged that English was an international language, a large number indicated that their reason for learning was that it was on trend; globalisation has contributed to this, especially use of the internet (Wu & Ben-Canaan, 2006).

Comparing Europeans from Dutch universities with the Libyans, it was evident that the Dutch were very motivated to learn English and started at an early age, with young children happy to communicate in English with friends outside their own national boundaries. In academic life it was stressed that access to materials written in English, and being able to

publish in English, were essential to credibility. The Dutch regarded English as an investment in their future, opening up opportunities for them, but this was not apparent in the Libyans. It was surprising that the scholarship programme for Libyans had not been an incentive for learning English.

Teachers' perceptions were that Libyan students were taking English as a means to a teaching job when they graduated. There does seem to be some evidence of this, although Eaton (2010) argues that having knowledge of a second language is no longer a guarantee of employment. Although young Libyans have an awareness that English may be important, they do not yet seem to have linked this to specific objectives, or to see it as opening up numerous opportunities in the future.

### **8.3.2 Teaching English**

The second aim was to examine the teaching of English in Libyan Higher Education. This investigation highlighted the challenges of teaching in the universities, when there is no set curriculum and little support for teaching staff. The inconsistency in the teaching content has resulted in no defined progression routes, and teachers have struggled when trying to update methodology as it has not been accepted within the existing system. An inconsistent curriculum was seen as one of the main barriers to learning, and also to progression. DaRosa, Skeff et al (2011) argue that curriculum sequencing is an impediment to effective teaching. Often students covered the same materials in subsequent years of study, while others were taught at the wrong level. There was no structure to the teaching. Each teacher had total control over what they were teaching and they taught from their own materials, which may or may not be relevant to the degree programme. There were complaints from both students and teaching staff that there were difficulties in understanding the curriculum, which was also regarded as not meeting their needs.

Many of the teachers felt that they were not getting the support they needed, especially in professional development courses which would introduce new teaching methodologies to them. This has resulted in most teachers opting for the more traditional approaches which are familiar to them (Atkin, 1966). Such teaching methodology was considered to be appropriate for theoretical subjects but ineffective for language learning where skills should be applied. However, teachers who had tried to introduce a more communicative approach into the classroom found that students were reluctant to attend those classes as they

preferred lessons where they did not need to participate. The teaching staff felt they were not provided with sufficient support in the form of seminars and additional training, and that they were not properly prepared. They suggested more structured teacher training both in the courses for trainee teachers at the university, and also for themselves, with a focus on methodology.

### **8.3.3 Learning English**

The third aim was to investigate issues in learning English in Libyan universities. It was found that the teaching environment had an impact on motivation in both students and teachers. The challenge in finding an available classroom for scheduled lessons, large class sizes and lack of resources and teaching aids all had an effect on the value placed on English tuition. Large classes have also been found to have an impact on creativity and quality (Al Tahrawi, 2007). Demand for university places has put pressure on the availability of classroom space. Teachers complained of going to teach their class and not being able to find an empty classroom. All were aware of serious overcrowding, and some described the classrooms as not being fit for purpose. Rooms built to accommodate twenty five students were being used for up to one hundred students. Several teachers mentioned the time wasted as students and staff tried to find each other on the campus, and the time spent taking attendance registers and trying to keep discipline in such large classes. Some of the classrooms lacked doors, windows and light. The teaching environment is not conducive to learning.

### **8.3.4 Successful English Teaching**

The fourth aim was to contribute to the understanding of successful English teaching. Factors which would improve teaching would be the provision of facilities which were fit for purpose, and the introduction of entry tests for university study. Computers were not provided at university level and there were limited opportunities for students and staff to use technological communication tools. If language labs existed in the universities, they were often old and out of order, so they were not used for enhancing English language skills. Although there were complaints about the lack of language labs, they may not contribute to modern language learning in the twenty-first century as digital technology is more readily available (Eaton, 2010).

However, the lack of modern technology as teaching aids was a concern to many, with Smartboards, projectors and audio-visual tools being highlighted. It was felt that all students should have a computer and a personal email address so that they could do their research online. This would then resolve issues such as five hundred and forty English language students at one university having access to just ten English books in the library. Unesco (2013) highlighted the need for ICT as it creates a skilled workforce, and a number of unemployed young Libyans would benefit from ICT skills. Nevertheless, good use of technology devices was made in Libya in 2011, when demonstrations were organised through the media of internet and mobile phones (Unesco, 2013), which indicates that there may be undiscovered opportunities to use technological communication tools.

Students and staff felt that using the English language every day was the main way of increasing interest in learning the language. However, teachers expressed concern that students were at university to pass exams, not to increase their knowledge and skills. The quality of the achievements was also questioned, with one teacher suggesting that a 100 per cent pass rate was not an incentive for motivation; however, there was optimism that the new political environment would change this. Teachers felt that there was a lack of motivation on the part of the students, who should not need extrinsic motivators, but one teacher acknowledged that the provision of good teachers, teaching aids and adequate classroom facilities should in themselves ensure good students. There is evidence that all of these are lacking and that they may play a role in successful English teaching.

#### **8.3.5 Impact of Political Change**

The final aim was to consider the impact of political change on English language teaching in Libyan universities. There was evidence that the banning of English previously had had a considerable effect on the quality of teaching, as the teachers recruited more recently had little experience of learning the language themselves. Whilst not denying that the scholarship programme is a positive initiative, the departure of all the experienced Libyan university staff in such large numbers left the university management with recruitment issues. The limited opportunities for Libyans to interact with native English speakers make it more difficult for students to see the relevance of learning English. Opportunities for practising English with native speakers were minimal and some of the teachers complained of the way that political decisions had stopped the teaching of English in earlier years. They

felt that this had contributed to many of the issues now evident, that English language teachers have been placed in a position where they can only pass on the theory of the language, rather than the skills.

University staff and students were not happy with the teachers' qualifications. This may refer to inexperience or lack of training, rather than accreditation. The university management viewed lack of experience as being the main issue in quality provision, and admitted that they were forced to take on any teachers available in order to fill gaps and cover classes. This was caused by many of the university teachers being abroad on scholarships, combined with an increasing demand for university places. Drawing upon evidence from the UAE, the retention of quality staff has been shown to be a key factor in the quality of universities (Collins, 2005; Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Schoepp, 2011).

Students and some of the teaching staff criticised the accents of foreign staff, intimating that they could not be understood. It was accepted that the English language teachers in schools were Libyan and there was an expressed preference for the university teachers to be Libyan as well. However, it was suggested that English native speakers were needed at university for accent and pronunciation, as Libyans had had little exposure to English native speakers (Al Moghani, 2003).

From the first interviews in 2010 through until the final ones at the end of 2012, considerable political changes have taken place in Libya. The views of the teachers have reflected these changes; initially there were complaints about the issues encountered, but gradually these became opinions and then solutions were suggested. This indicates that political events have had an impact on teaching staff in the universities.

#### **8.4 Contribution to Knowledge**

This study has been carried out over a period of change in Libya and it has therefore provided an insight into a transitional period in Libya's history. It has also defined the issues of teaching and learning English at university level within a changing environment. By identifying these issues, this study has been able to make recommendations for resolving them. However, the process of undertaking research during this period contributes much to the understanding of the difficulties involved in collecting a set of data and making sense of

it when great changes are taking place. The study captures a moment in time that will never be repeated and therefore its contribution to knowledge is unique. In terms of political context, the study has taken place over a time of rather painful transition from the Gaddafi regime to a more uncertain future. The routines that ordinary Libyans had known all their lives had suddenly vanished and yet there was nothing to take their place. A transitional council and then an elected government have both faced enormous challenges as the new leaders have not had the experiences nor the skills to deal with transforming a society. It is likely that there will still be some years of unrest before Libya finds its place in the world, but it will have undergone changes which have been just emerging during the course of this study.

#### **8.4.1 The Length of Time**

The data collection took much longer than anticipated. This was not just because of the difficulties of locating participants, but also because of the changing results that were coming through in the data. In order to keep with the currency of events, the data needed to be fresh, which was why extra field visits were required. Without currency, the results would lose value and have little impact on the purpose of the investigation, which was to provide recommendations. However, there was no way of knowing what would be involved in the early days as the situation kept evolving. It was therefore a difficult decision to make as to whether the research should use the data captured at a specific time, or whether it should endeavour to investigate the changing situation. Financial decisions also had to be made about extending the time taken to complete the research.

#### **8.4.2 The Risks**

In the first chapter the risks of carrying out this research have been detailed. There were personal risks as there were curfews and no group meetings were permitted. In order to contact participants extra vigilance was needed. Instead of carrying out interviews in public places, it was necessary to conduct these in private homes. Travelling across town to interview people also required passing army roadblocks, and the risk of being caught up in demonstrations. The researcher had to make decisions about the risks, not only to himself, but to the participants involved. On a number of occasions interviews were cancelled at the last minute due to security. This also presented a challenge as the communications network was not operational.



### **8.4.3 Barriers**

Trying to locate participants was one of the main issues as the universities were closed for security reasons. It was not possible to use the internet and all mobile phones were monitored, therefore contacting potential interviewees was by using an improvised snowballing technique, where messages were passed through word of mouth. On the third and fourth visits it was also not possible to access the original universities planned, as it was too dangerous to travel outside a particular area. At the time there were bombings from NATO as well as confusion regarding conflicts between the pro-Gaddafi forces and the rebels. Some of the students were killed in the fighting, and others armed themselves with guns, which made the environment very difficult for the teachers. Many of the teachers were not willing to be interviewed.

### **8.4.4 Opportunities**

Despite the country being at war, it was a unique opportunity to interview participants over four distinct periods in Libya's history. The initial visit to gather information about issues was during the Gaddafi regime; the second visit was when the demonstrations commenced; the third visit was under the transitional council; and the final visit was when a new government had been elected. The data charted changes in the views and opinions of participants over this time; the initial complaints about issues in the early data became more focused over time and participants started to give their own thoughts on resolving the issues. Being able to capture this change in attitude through this study contributes to understanding the limitations that can be imposed by political regimes, when participants may be more guarded in their disclosures.

### **8.4.5 Limitations of Study**

It must be acknowledged that there have been methodological limitations to this study, especially in terms of collecting data under such political conditions. The sampling was not able to be carried out as originally planned, and not all of the teaching staff were able to be interviewed. The main impact was that it was not possible to interview foreign teaching staff, as they all left the country so rapidly while they still had the opportunity to leave. In order to continue with the research, the interviews were conducted with the staff still available at the universities. On occasion this was at considerable risk to them, therefore this required a risk assessment, as curfews were imposed and group meetings were curtailed. Consequently, it may be that the only participants willing to be interviewed were

those with stronger views than others who preferred not to take any risks. The interviews also took place within a smaller geographical area than originally planned as it was too dangerous to travel. The sample was one of convenience, although this has not had a great impact on the results as it may have done had it been all quantitative data. Opinions and perspectives were still provided by university teaching staff in Libyan Higher Education. It is difficult to suggest ways in which such limitations may be overcome in future, as this was an unusual and unique situation which highlights the risks and the limitations of researching during a period of war.

## **8.5 Recommendations**

To improve the teaching of English in Libyan Higher Education, the following recommendations are proposed. These recommendations are based on the suggestions made by participants in the study, as well as on findings from other research in available literature. The author has also observed the teaching of English in UK universities, both from his own experience and from the feedback of others, so that he has been able to make informed decisions about specific areas of concern.

1. A diagnostic test should be carried out as a pre-entry requirement for studying English at university. For those not meeting the entry requirement, an intensive summer school should be organised so that levels can be raised to an acceptable standard. This would then ensure that the students taking an English programme were more motivated to improve their language skills, and that they recognised that skills and knowledge were required to undertake an English course at university. It would also provide a basic starting level for all entrants and make it easier for the teachers to prepare lessons appropriate for developing English skills at university level. The diagnostic test could be implemented as part of the application system for university and conducted while students were in their final year at school, giving enough time to arrange summer schools for those not meeting the criteria.
2. Students studying English as a major should be offered a 3 month course in an English speaking country as part of their degree programme. This could be implemented through a partnership with an international university, forming links which would benefit both. Not only would this motivate students, it would also improve their communication skills and provide them with a cultural context for

using the language. This has been used successfully on language degree courses in other European countries, and students would benefit from a certificate of attendance from an English speaking university for their future job prospects. It could also be used as a means of developing relationships with the foreign university for future study there, or for future collaborations.

3. An online course with native English speakers should be used as a supplement when there are no native English speakers available within the university. More use should be made of accessible platforms such as Skype or Google+ to provide teacher interaction with native English speakers. This is dependent on the current infrastructure being improved so that there is a fast broadband access within the universities (see recommendation number 8). Students would benefit from listening to different English accents, and this would help them to improve their pronunciation as well as their confidence in speaking.
4. The Ministry of Education should have overall control of the curriculum and set standards for all universities. There should be a Centre for Curriculum run by the Minister of Education and the university curriculum should be updated regularly by a committee of experts. This Centre for Curriculum should be a state of the art facility with the latest resources available. A set curriculum would raise standards and ensure teachers had a structure to what they were teaching. It would also benefit students as they would achieve a specific standard across all the universities, and they would be able to continue their studies if they moved from one establishment to another.
5. English lessons should be relevant to the students to encourage motivation. All skills should be practised as traditional methods of teaching do not cover these skills adequately. Modern methods should be used, including tutorials. If students can see that their lessons fall within a plan or curriculum, they can chart their own progress. Teachers can ensure that students know what they are going to be able to do by the end of a session by advising of the learning outcomes. Having a tutorial system allows teachers to build up a professional relationship with students, which many saw as an issue, and also detect and rectify any weaknesses in the students' progress.

6. The Libyan government should continue with the building programme giving priority to education facilities. This should include sanitary facilities suited to the number of students using the building. Modern facilities will improve the wellbeing of staff and students within the universities and make the environment more conducive to teaching and learning.
7. Classrooms should be air-conditioned and should provide a safe and healthy teaching and learning environment. Comfortable furniture should be provided for students attending classes up to three hours. The teaching staff should have their own offices, which can then be used for tutorials. Raising the comfort level of the teaching environment will mean that teachers and students can focus on their studies rather than the discomfort of their surroundings. An office for the teaching staff allows teachers to feel that the university is a place for productive work.
8. Development should be in ensuring the infrastructure is available for broadband access and that modern technology is brought into the classroom. The latest multi-media language labs should be in every university English language department. These will then allow access to English speaking media and encourage participation, so that the use of English can be viewed within a natural rather than artificial environment.
9. Structured teacher training programmes should be provided. Teachers should be offered the opportunity of spending six months in an English speaking country as part of their professional development. This would improve their communication skills and give them the confidence to teach all the English skills, including speaking and writing. They would also gain in updating their vocabulary as languages change rapidly, and would be able to impart their knowledge within a cultural context. Teachers have argued that they are not getting the support they need and having a system of professional development for teachers would give them the perception that they are being fully supported and valued.
10. Teacher exchange programmes should be set up to maintain teaching methodology at international standards as well as to improve and update cultural and language skills. Such exchange programmes would enable more co-operation between Libya and other countries but it would essentially benefit teachers who could observe teaching practices in more developed countries.

11. Summer schools for teachers should be provided in English speaking countries to refresh skills and make international contacts. This could be developed as part of the professional development programme. Short three week or one month summer schools in a country such as the UK would give Libyan teachers of English the confidence and skills to use their English in their classes and improve the communication skills of their students, many of whom complained that the teachers had poor English language skills.
12. Academic activities such as research, attendance at, participation in, and organisation of conferences, and publishing in journals should be encouraged. Teaching staff should also be encouraged to publish their own books. This would give international recognition to the university teaching staff and ensure that they were respected by their students and colleagues. Many have studied in foreign universities on scholarship programmes and this would also provide value to the government for their investment.
13. There should be at least one native English speaker in every English language department. This could be arranged through a one year exchange programme providing English language assistants. Being able to communicate with an English speaker in the university would boost confidence in speaking and listening skills, and also support the teachers. All students could have a timetabled session each week as part of their course, and this would address in some way the issue of lack of exposure to the English language.
14. Workshops and other activities should be encouraged so that teachers and students have every opportunity of practising their English. Activities could include competitions and monthly magazines written by teachers and students. By having such activities, it would allow teachers and students to view English as part of their everyday routine and would give them the opportunity of using the language in a natural way. The more activities that could be promoted in English, the more exposure students and teachers would have to the language and they would benefit from practising their skills outside the classroom.
15. Class sizes for English language classes should be limited to a maximum of 15 students. Language classes in particular benefit from smaller class sizes as learning a language should be interactive. If classes are smaller, students learn more quickly as

they are all given the opportunity to practise their skills. A large class tends to slow down language learning as opportunities for using the language in class are limited. Small class sizes would improve the outcomes and students would be able to achieve the levels of competence required by the end of their programme.

16. English should be introduced when children start school. This would allow children to become familiar with a foreign language. It should be through the medium of games, and special programmes should be designed for this age group, so that learning a language can be seen as fun as well as educational. Programmes could include interactive activities requiring little input from the teachers, given that there may be a serious lack of English language teachers available to teach this age group. Structured activities making use of technology could be designed to introduce the English language at an early age and ensure that it becomes an integral part of the early years curriculum.

## **8.6 Scope for Further Research**

In contextualising the findings from a developing country by comparing with an established European country such as the Netherlands, the study provides a point of reference for further studies. As Libya continues to develop, then there will be more scope for benchmarking. Comparative studies with other countries, including across the Arab states, will provide more understanding of the teaching of English in universities of developing countries.

Further studies could provide more information on the impact of Libyan university staff returning to their posts with qualifications from English speaking countries. It would allow a measurement of the benefits of studying at a university in an English speaking country and whether this had an effect on the teaching of English and research activities within Libyan Higher Education.

As Libya continues to develop, there will be more opportunities for further research on the changes implemented and the challenges which may still underlie the teaching of English in Libyan universities. For future studies, however, it is recommended that research focuses on

specific areas of Libya and looks at the different cultures which may be emerging from this transitional political period.

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## APPENDIX 1

### 1. Questionnaire for students

1.	I believe the methods of teaching used are effective and beneficial to my learning
2.	I believe the teachers are up-to-date with all new ideas
3.	I find the teaching rooms comfortable and pleasant working environments
4.	I consider the teaching materials attractive and easy to understand
5.	I find the assessment activities appropriate for my course and level
6.	I am given regular constructive feedback to help me to improve
7.	My teachers motivate me to do well
8.	I believe the level of English teaching is high
9.	Non-native English speaking teachers are sympathetic to the needs of students
10.	I believe the course is well organised
11.	I feel I am making progress
12.	I use the English lab regularly
13.	I find the class sizes appropriate
14.	I am happy with the transportation system
15.	I have a good rapport with my teachers
16.	Teaching staff are effective at explaining things
17.	The timetable works effectively for me
18.	I feel my English communication skills have improved
19.	I believe staff are enthusiastic about their subject
20.	I am always able to contact staff when necessary
21.	I have enough opportunity to speak English in class
22.	We do not listen to native speaking English enough in class

In the second section the students were asked to rate the quality of specific areas which had been highlighted in the initial data collection. This was again to determine the depth of dissatisfaction with identified issues of concern and to make a judgement on whether they were valid issues.

Teaching
Classroom resources
Teachers' English speaking skills
Exam preparation
Learning activities
Classroom management
Feedback

The third section was used to elicit more detailed information and open questions were used to give participants space to give their own opinions. This would then give more understanding of the issues identified in the previous two sections.

- 1 - Why are you learning English?
  - 2 - When do you think would be a good time to start learning English to prepare you for Higher Education?
  - 3 - How well do you think you were prepared in English language at secondary school?
  - 4 - What do you find most challenging about learning English?
  - 5 - Identify up to 3 things that you think would improve the teaching of English
- What other comments do you have?

## 2. Questionnaire for teachers

The teaching staff were also asked to which extent they agreed with a number of statements and these related primarily to their teaching environment..

1.	I have had sufficient training to carry out my job satisfactorily
2.	I find there are plenty of good teaching resources in the library
3.	I believe the premises are comfortable and suitable for learning
4.	I consider the assessment activities are appropriate for the course
5.	I believe there are too many exams on the course
6.	I find my students have an adequate starting level of English
7.	I use the English lab
8.	I use a lesson plan for all my teaching sessions
9.	I give constructive feedback to my students so they can improve
10.	My students have high levels of motivation
11.	A large class size affects my teaching
12.	I attend regular meetings with my department
13.	Observations by colleagues are carried out
14.	I am up-to-date with the latest teaching methods
15.	My students make progress in my classes
16.	I find the teaching materials suitable for my students
17.	I believe the programmes are well managed
18.	I receive regular feedback from management
19.	I have many opportunities for professional development
20.	I design my own teaching materials

The teachers were then asked to rate seven areas of concern which had been identified in the initial data collection. These again related to their teaching environment and would provide more reliability to the statements in the first section.



Learning resources
Building
Rooms
Leadership
Furnishings of classroom
Departmental administration
English lab

The third section for the teachers contained open questions to elicit their opinions on issues identified in the initial data collection.

1 - Why do you think English language is important for Libyan students?

2 - When do you think would be a good time to start learning English to prepare your students for Higher Education?

3 - How well do you think your students were prepared in English language before they started their degree studies?

4 - What do you find most challenging about teaching English?

5 - Identify up to 3 things that you think would improve the teaching of English

Any further comments?

